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ANNIS WARLEIGH'S
FORTUNES.

A Novel.

BY HOLME LEE,

AUTHOR OF

"SYLVAN HOLT'S DAUGHTER," "KATHIE BRANDE,"
&c., &c.



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BY HOLME LEE,

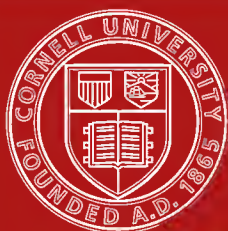
AUTHOR OF

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ANNIS WARLEIGH'S FORTUNES.

PART FIRST.

THE ELDER GENERATION.

CHAPTER THE FIRST.

HOME.

Glad sight whenever new with old
Is joined through some dear home-born tie;
The life of all that we behold
Depends upon that mystery.—WORSWORTH.

I.

It was like a dream! From her own window—the window of her own dear old room *at home*—Rachel Withers was looking over the wide moorland, wrapped in its rich purple August mantle, where the sunset glowed with a fervent heat, and the winds that were never still frolicked roughly by in their breezy play; over the ripening corn-fields, and hilly pastures, and warm-scented fir-woods to Hurtle-Force, where the river rushed down the rocks in two great silvery leaps, then, in a shallow, stone-encumbered bed, wound its devious way through the beautiful little valley, past the church, past Prior's Mill, under the steep arch of Riccall bridge, by Brafferton and Floyd's Seat, to the wider levels of the plain, where it was lost in a hazy glory of gold and crimson evening clouds.

Oh! the delight of being at home again in these wild, familiar scenes. The people welcomed them back as they might have welcomed kinsfolk, and an exile of six years had only made their old pastor's children love them better. There was very little change either within or without the rectory. A few faces of ancient friends had disappeared, and some of the unkempt bairns had grown up into rough-hewn men and women; but there had been no wholesale emigrations such as occur in less isolated places, and all the families were still where they were. The parish was wide and scattered, but John Withers was vigorous, and hard walking never came amiss to him, any more than it had done to his father. He was off up the dale now to the Hurtlemere House, where Sir William Warleigh was staying for the shooting. Rachel would have accompanied him, but they did not know who was there besides; Laurence they were sure was abroad, and the girls had not appeared at church yet; while sleek, crafty, velvet-gloved Oliver with the claws was never a favorite of hers.

In-doors they were quite settled already. As Mr. Brooke took the household plensishing off their hands when they went away, so they had

taken it back off his widow's hands when she was obliged to leave. Thus, each piece of furniture was an intimate acquaintance, and as the Brookes were a thrifty, childless couple, nothing looked the worse for its alien service. The carved oak that their parents gathered together when they were married, suited the wainscoted rooms; for, if quaint and cumbrous, it was also rich. It was a pleasure inexpressible for Rachel to help John in putting the precious volumes of their father's library up on their old shelves, and, as nearly as they could recollect, in their old places, until, now that they were arranged, they looked as if they had never been away. The garden had been beautifully kept in their absence, and Kester Greaves, who was the Brookes's *odd man*, remained with them in the same capacity; Mary Deane, the cook, also staid, and Phemie, her cousin, as housemaid; and they, with two dogs and a cat, made up the Withers's present domestic establishment.

Their old friends the Andersides were at Brafferton still, but the gray curate was gone—promoted to a parsonage of his own amongst the Potteries—and a Mr. Gilsland worked in his stead. He was a Trinity man, like John Withers, but took his degree a year earlier. Their acquaintance was very slight while at Cambridge, but they seemed disposed now to cultivate each other's society; and Mr. Gilsland congratulated himself loudly on meeting with a civilized companion amongst the *barbarians*, as he called the canny dales' folk. Rachel was surprised that he did not appreciate them more highly; the rough humor and strong practical sense that distinguished them were traits of character which she thought most men would have valued. A plain, home-spun race they undeniably were, and blunt and independent in their ways, but also they were full of honest self-respect, and of a simple, sincere kindness that usually proved most attachable qualities between priest and people. John Withers vowed that he would rather lay his bones in the dust of Hurtle-dale than migrate even to a hishopric, and of the same counsel was his sister; for oh! how homie the familiar landscape looked that night! how freshly the native air blew in on her brow through the open window! She could almost have cried for joy when she thought they were at home once more—at home once more!

Their father had been rector of Hurtle-dale

for nearly forty years, and had survived the loss of his wife only three months, dying a few days after his son's ordination. John was Rachel's elder by ten years; he was the first-born of his mother, and she was her little recking. Of the three children who came between them not one outlived the perils of infancy. They left home, therefore, in the early days of their mourning, brother and sister, alone in the world, yet they left it divided; John to go to his first curacy in Wales, and Rachel to encounter the unknown hardships of life at school. It was terrible to look forward to, but, after all, she was very happy there. She would not have forgotten any of the time between then and now if she could, or any of the friends she found amongst her young companions. There was great pleasure in that enthusiasm of girls' love, and she counted those white days long on which their letters came; though she had begun to see that the glory of it must soon pass away, and that already two or three were falling off from the list, absorbed into hopes and cares and duties other than those of visionary youth.

John laughed at her romance, but he had quite as strong a genius for friendship as herself. Were not Arthur Hill and he almost more than brothers? It was always gala-day when they two met after ever so brief a separation, and John was the better for it a whole month after. They were not likely to come together at present, however, for Arthur Hill had just gone abroad as traveling tutor with a young Scotch nobleman, and was not to return to Hurdedale for a year or more. John had hoped to catch him, were it only for a single day, before his departure; but the first news he heard when he arrived at the rectory with his sister was, that Arthur Hill had been over the previous evening to see if they were come, as he was setting off to Carlisle to join his charge early on the following day. This was a great disappointment to both, and it seemed the more grievous that they had thus missed each other by only a few hours. But except this one cross to their anticipations, the Withers's had had a perfectly happy return to Hurdedale.

II.

Rachel Withers was a sensible, well-principled, every-day young woman, not pretty, but pleasing; plump, rosy, good-humored, and healthy; not romantic to look at, but with a fund of real romance in her heart. She was one of those happy-tempered people who never quite outlive their illusions. Any child of average expertness might have taken her in, for she never suspected bad motives or was afflicted with mean suspicions. She believed all the world to be as sincere, straightforward, and kindly disposed as herself; but do not from this argue her a fool. She was only eighteen, and had lived her life hitherto amongst honest people.

She esteemed it a happy fate to be elected her brother's housekeeper on leaving school, instead of having to turn out into the world to fight her way amongst strangers—a possibility which judicious friends had considered it a duty to keep well before her eyes during the progress of her education, that she might be broken in to the idea of work if it became practically desirable in the end that she should undertake it.

If John should marry, then the chances were that she would have to go adrift on some course of her own, for though she had a little money, she had not a competence; but that might be a long day first, and as provisions of evil are foolish, and she was of a cheerful disposition, she put them resolutely away from her mind, and would none of their harassment.

She soon began to have her share of the parish work tolerably well in hand. There was no extreme poverty amongst the people. It was possible to know the ways and means of every man, woman, and child in the dale, and to prevent by timely aid of one kind or another the sharp pinch of such necessity as often cripples the poor of great towns in seasons of scarcity. The faces of the little ones at school were full and ruddy enough, and when the bairns are not pined things are never much amiss with the locker at home. Her chief misgiving as to how she should get on in her office of purveyor of the rectory charities, was that she could not bear to see physical want of any kind without wishing to relieve it; and experienced persons warned her that such appearances were apt to be deceitful; she could not offer a good book and advice in lieu of bread and brands if signs of hunger and a cold hearthstone met her eyes; and she would certainly rather give to six who had no need, and who were taking her in, than send one poor body faint and empty away. By and by, like other beginners, she would learn to discriminate between real and feigned or *earned* distress, John encouragingly said, but meanwhile she must not expect to go quite scot-free from mistakes and their vexatious consequences. Mary Deane promised to be a great assistance to her when she was in doubt or difficulty; a shrewd dales-woman herself, and many years servant at the rectory, she was beforehand with those who tried to impose on her young mistress; but at the same time she was always ready with a good word for such as deserved one. She mentioned Effie Benson, for instance, as a worthy woman both meriting and requiring little occasional helps.

"She puts on a fair face afore folk, but she's worse off than a many that looks downright starved," was Mary's testimony. "She's that clean you might eat your dinner off of her stone floor, and that proud she would not beg bit nor sup if she were dying o' want. They are often that way—them that has seen better days. There's handsome things in her house, and the walls is her own, and the roof's her own, and the patch o' ground's her own, but I'm thinking that's well nigh all she has except the four pounds o' rent she gets for the paddock that's let to Robb at Prior's Mill. And she's past work if ever she were fit for much, which may be she wasn't. She knitted socks for old master; but Mr. Withers doesn't happen to wear worsted socks?" Yes, he did, and that reminded Rachel that he would want new ones for the coming winter: therefore Effie should have the pins and the yarn to-morrow.

Then amongst those Mary would fain have discouraged, there was Ally Wray, whom Rachel recollected at perpetual feud with her old man, since whose death she had come out quite a changed character—at least as far as tongue goes. When Rachel went to pay her her first

visit Ally whined, and shook her head, and talked *goody* in the most amazing manner; lamenting her dear Cranky—with whom she had quarreled actively and passively every day of his life—as if they had been the most affectionate and united couple in the dale. “Auld Cant,” Mary called her, and doled out her share of soup with grumbling reluctance. Mr. Anderside had a queer story against two of his nieces, simple, worthy ladies, whom she had completely hoodwinked with her pious talk. They put her into a pathetic little tract, and when they left Hurdledale, they sent copies of it to the school for distribution; since which revelation of her successful pretences, Ally had been esteemed by her neighbors wickeder than ever; indeed the flimsy romance was a study more curious than edifying to those who knew Ally’s choice familiar phrases, her fables and her hypocrisies; but Auld Cant though she was, Rachel would not curtail her of her flannel or her soup, even at Mary’s indignant suggestion; for she was nearly destitute, and had only a half-witted son to work for her.

The village school-mistress was a fagged, lean, white little woman who always looked at the last gasp of weariness; but she contrived to get through her business well, and to make the girls neat, plain sewers. To Rachel’s great satisfaction she found none of them cobbling at bits of coarse, muslin embroidery, and the most primitive notions of usefulness still prevailed amongst them. The schoolmaster had also a jaded and over-worked appearance, and he worried the boys with too much preaching; but he and his wife were a respectable, worthy couple, and when they had a better system to go upon, would neither wear out themselves nor their scholars so much as they had done. Mrs. Brooke confessed to Rachel that she never could take a real interest in the schools; consequently they were not well overlooked, and many things would bear improvement.

Mr. Gilsland was pleased to laugh at what he called Rachel’s laborious energy as a reformer—though indeed she had accomplished nothing yet—and to predict speedy fatigue. “New brooms sweep clean,” said he, speaking proverbially; “but they wear out and grow slack at their work in time. For my part, I know no more unthankful duty than that of trying to raise the condition of these cloddish barbarians.”

Rachel could not agree with him, neither could John; but then they had been horn and bred amongst the people, and were as familiar with their sterling virtues as with their harsh speech and rough manners. This Mr. Gilsland was not. He had come amongst them a stranger, apparently with preconceived notions of rustic picturesqueness and simplicity; and being rudely disenchanted by his first impressions, did not seem to have cared to try whether the ore below the surface was worth laboring or not; and thus he found no pleasure in a lot which had some of the happiest opportunities in the world. John Withers endeavored to convince him of his error; for he did not like to see a man falling weary of his duties, and yielding to discouragement without an effort to withstand its deadening influence; but his success was very partial; for Mr. Gilsland was not a person easily moved to give up a prejudice when his personal tastes and refinements were involved therein.

III.

When John Withers and his sister came home again to Hurdledale, Mrs. Sara Grandage, Rachel’s godmamma, was away in Scotland, but she presently returned, and on the morrow after they heard of her arrival, they went over to pay her a visit in her delicious old nest at Prior’s Bank. She vivaciously declared herself neither a day older nor a day worse than when they left her six years before, and was as full of pleasant satirical speeches as ever. Bittersweet was the old lady’s name with them formerly, and Bittersweet would she be as long as there was an atom of her left. They found her in the garden, leaning on her tall stick, and presiding over the labors of three weeding boys, to whose diligence she gave any thing but commendatory testimony.

“One boy is a boy,” said she; “two boys are half a boy, and three boys are no boy at all, unless you have your eye on them every moment.” And then she marshaled them round the bank, pointing out her alterations, and confessing with much truth that her pet shrubs took almost too much exercise for health in their transplanting and re-transplanting. The main features of the place would continue always the same in their romantic beauty, but every little detail seemed to have undergone a change since the Withers’ saw it last. There was a new wild-flower walk winding round by the river under the ash-trees that was charming. Mrs. Sara Grandage had had the plants brought from far and near, and even from abroad to garnish it; and in the spring it looked like fairy-land with its splendor of gentian and violet, primrose and anemone, bluebell and daffodil, overhung and mingled in with rare choice ferns which flourished luxuriantly in the warm, moist, sheltered nooks of the rocks. Rachel felt tired after their three-mile walk, but her godmamma was as brisk as a bee, and kept them out full an hour in the sun before she dared plead a reasonable fatigue. Twice John tried to beguile her indoors, but she would not go until she pleased, and then it was almost time to set out on their return. She insisted, however, on their remaining to drink tea, and bribed John to consent by promising them the pony carriage and Clip, her factotum, to drive them home in the moonlight over the moor.

Whether Bittersweet grew older or not must be left to her own feelings, but she certainly grew smaller in the world. As she sat perched in her high-cushioned chair before the table, daintily sipping her costly tea, Rachel thought she had never seen any thing human so wee or so witch-like. Malice twinkled in her bright black eye, and what in other old folk’s faces would be called crow’s-feet, in hers were the curls of laughter and of merry mockery that had not yet by any means mocked or laughed their last.

“Well, Johnny man,” said she, after critically considering him for several silent minutes; “your beard is grown, and it is not red after all—perhaps you are not such a pepper-box as you used to be? Clip protests you are grand in the pulpit—six foot if you are an inch. And he allows that you preach *middlin’*. I shall come and hear you myself, though what a lad like you can have to tell an old woman who has known sixty years of the ups and downs of the world I can not guess! I hope you don’t give more than twenty minutes’ sermon? I never had much

taste for long sermons since I feel asleep under your grandfather's, which had as many heads as Hydra and always hummed over the hour. If they could all have hummed together, it would have abridged the discourse and have been a mighty improvement."

The old lady then turned her pointed observation on Rachel, and was graciously pleased to say, that she had not come home spoilt, so far as she could detect. "John has appropriated more than his share of the family beauty, but your face will wear well, Mistress Rachel," continued she. "It will wear well, and you will be handsomer at eight-and-thirty than you are at eighteen; and eight-and-thirty is a very trying period for a woman, let me tell you, especially if she be single. I call it the grizzling age when one is neither old nor young, and when whatever is ugly in temper or character comes out and stamps the countenance for the rest of a lifetime. Cultivate your cheerfulness, my dear, and your faculty of enjoying little present pleasures, and you will find yourself at sixty lively and ever-green still."

Then she gossiped of her friends and neighbors near and remote; told her young guests how she thought Kitty Anderside had done foolishly in refusing to accompany the gray curate to the Potteries; how Mr. Gilsland was not—in her opinion—worth his shoe-leather as a hill-pastor; how Sir William Warleigh had driven his elder son abroad by his persecutions; how Oliver had contracted a prudent marriage with a well-dowered widow lady considerably older than himself; and how, finally, the girls were just as solitary and neglected as ever.

"Mrs. Damer Warleigh of Bristowe is their one friend," said she; "and even her daughters do not go to Whinstane. In fact, no gentleman but Mrs. Damer Warleigh ever does go to Whinstane. Sir William boozes with his grooms and other questionable company—the only company he can command—and she would stay away but for a promise she made to their mother when she was dying. Somebody told me they were up at the Hurtlemere House now with their father, but I have never seen them about; perhaps he will not let them go beyond the gates here any more than at Whinstane."

John Withers said he could not enlighten her. When he paid his visit of ceremony Sir William was out in the woods, and the great pew in the church had been unoccupied last Sunday. Sir William had not called at the rectory since, and they had seen no one from the Hurtlemere House of whom they could inquire. But if the girls were really there, he hoped Rachel would see them soon and renew their acquaintance.

IV.

The evening next after this, Mr. Anderside spent at the rectory, and on some reference being made by Rachel Withers to Sir William Warleigh and his peculiar ways, the old gentleman startled his host by exclaiming contemptuously: "Sir William is a Warleigh by name only—not one drop of the blood of that ancient and respectable stock flows in his veins! Colonel Warleigh of Penslaven picked him up by mischance during a night-ride from his cousin's house at Bristow—an ugly, wide-mouthed, swarthy brat, dropped by some trav-

eling tinker's drab, and left to perish in the snow. The Colonel was not commonly a humane man—rather the reverse, indeed—but he heard the child squeal, dismounted, lifted it out of the mire, and carried it home to Penslaven, when the kitchen-wench brought it up in conjunction with the grooms until it developed into the wickedest imp that perhaps ever came on earth for the furtherance of its father's business!"

This was one of the secrets that every body knows, and that nobody much cares to talk about. The circumstances happened long before Rachel or John Withers was born—full fifty years ago—but they were not of a nature to be forgotten until after the lapse of generations. Neither John nor his sister had, however, any knowledge of them beyond common report, which had clouded the original event with a haze of supernatural traditions, the property of every winter fireside story-teller in the dales. They were glad, therefore, to have lit upon an authentic source of information, and Mr. Anderside was probably the most authentic now in existence; for he had been curate at Penslaven when the incident took place. John and Rachel both questioned him, and he told them the story as far as he knew it; premising that his old patron, the Colonel himself, had done his utmost to envelop the beginnings of it in mystery, and to discourage any inquiry that might have brought the simple facts to light.

The world in general, and Colonel Warleigh's near connections in particular, he said, excused his eccentricities on the plea that he was rather mad; and some such plea was needed when, having quarreled with his cousin Damer, and being himself wifeless and childless, he devised the mortifying expedient of educating his beggar's brat, of giving him his name and making him his heir. Thenceforward the misshapen urchin was Master William Warleigh. Tailors clothed him, tutors labored at him, toadies flattered him, and he became a man—a man characterized by a low shrewdness, a malignant cunning, and a dastardly tyrannical spirit. In due time Colonel Warleigh married him to a very youthful, pretty, proud girl, who with her little fortune had been unwisely committed to his guardianship; and she, having borne him four children, and suffered his brutality twelve years, broke her heart and died. There was a portrait of her hanging still in the great drawing-room at Whinstane Tower—a delicate, fair-skinned, dark-eyed woman, handsome and imperious—the process of breaking such a woman's heart must have been cruel, but Sir William did it.

One of the grewsome dales' legends said that Lady Warleigh walked and wept still in the great chambers at Whinstane Tower just as she did in her lifetime; and certain it was that from the day of her burial the most intimate scene of her endurance had been locked, barred, and sealed against every intruder, and her husband betook himself for his nightly rest to a room in the servants' quarters, where he lay upon a sofa with a rug over him, and fire and candles burning all the year round. He had a right to be haunted by an evil conscience if ever man had; but the vault in Penslaven Church must have

been far, far too welcome a refuge for his wife that she should ever be tempted to stray back to Whinstane Tower, where her degrading martyrdom was undergone.

In answer to some further inquiries from John Withers, Mr. Anderside told them that Colonel Warleigh had lived long enough to fear and distrust his adopted heir, and to love and cherish the little Laurence—eldest born son of that ill-omened marriage. He paid a heavy penalty for the indulgence of his vindictive caprices; for as he grew old and feeble, he found a bitter tyrant in Sir William—that graceless savage in looks and manners, lower in all his passions and instincts than the horse he rode, or the dogs he thrashed. When he died, Sir William became undisputed master of Penslaven and Whinstanedale; master of four children, living reminders of his half-murdered wife; master of a pack of hounds, and a pack of servants, each one of whom, dogs as well as men, was his superior. His baronetcy, a parliamentary bribe, his rank as county magnate and member, and his power as a great landed proprietor, made his name notorious. He was a man hated and feared—a man to whom soon none but the basest and most servile of his class would extend the hand of fellowship. Penslaven he let as soon as it became his own, continuing to live on at Whinstane Tower with his two sons and two daughters, who were growing up into men and women, while he was scarcely past middle age; for Colonel Warleigh had married him to his unhappy wife very young, and the children had been born early and in rapid succession.

Mr. Hill, who got the living of Penslaven when Mr. Anderside's rector was removed to a deanery, gave them all lessons together, and as nature had not withheld from them capacity, they had made their profit out of them. He considered them a very peculiar group of young people. Nothing knew they of the facts of their paternity. They contemplated the fine old Warleigh portraits with undisturbed complacency as the portraits of their veritable progenitors, and, apparently, never speculated how such a boor as their father, with the flat head and bull neck, could have sprung from that ancient and courtly stock. They even picked out Warleigh features and Warleigh traits of character in each other, and accounted for them by line and rule of the family traditions—and it was undeniable that such features and such traits they actually possessed, though how they came by them was an inexplicable enigma to the gossips.

Rachel Withers had a dim recollection of the girls as children, when she was a very little child herself, and also of once seeing their mother in the fir-wood behind the Hurtlemere House, walking and talking with her own. This was the last time Lady Warleigh was ever in the dale. Two or three years later, John Withers and Laurence Warleigh struck up a staunch alliance, which was periodically renewed when Sir William came over in August, and brought his family to remain a month. Boys and girls both ran wild, and the young Withers with them. Indeed, when they were all together, they were not easy to keep within bounds. Rachel remembered the fragile thing Grace was

very distinctly, and how Laurence used to carry her pick-a-back when she fell tired on their rambles. Katherine was much stronger, and very independent. She liked them all except Oliver, who, John used to say, was *sly*; she did not know of her own knowledge that he was sly, but she knew that he was cruel to animals, and that he had an ugly, sneering mouth, like the picture of Apollyon in *Pilgrim's Progress*, and that they called him, even to his face, "velvet-gloved Oliver with the claws."

Mr. Anderside spoke of Laurence Warleigh as one who had originally the making of a fine character in him. He had a rash and hasty temper, but he was affectionate and generous, and there was a warm-hearted sincerity about him that Oliver totally lacked. Oliver, he said, was always quiet and ready, with considerable ability, ambition, and guile. He had never come to open quarrel with Sir William, as had done his more impetuous brother, and long since he began to find his advantage in a wily forbearance. Every body about Whinstane knew who was the favorite son.

Oliver also had fared better with respect to education than Laurence; he was sent to a public school and afterward to Cambridge, while Laurence was never away from the dales until he was nearly twenty. At Mrs. Damer Warleigh's instance, he was then permitted to go abroad with a fit companion for three years of foreign travel. Returning home at the expiration of his leave of absence, the coarse, domineering habits of his father revolted him. He found himself, though a man, still checked, thwarted, and tasked like a school-boy. Incessant quarrels arose, and his life at Whinstane Tower became, at length, an existence of dull, degrading misery. He first remonstrated, then resisted, and finally—for peace sake, and because he saw no term to his persecutions—left home altogether. Sir William refused to make him any allowance, and for nearly seven years he had been wandering to and fro the world, subsisting on the little means he derived from the sheepwalks of Hurtledale, which he possessed independent of his father. The old Hurtlemere House and two farms adjacent were bequeathed to him by his godfather, Moor Murray, a famous Nimrod in his generation, who lived in those parts a life of contented savagery, and died while Laurence was still a boy. Since Moor Murray's death, the Hurtlemere House had served humbly as a farmstead, two or three apartments only being kept up for the use of Sir William and those he brought over for the shooting.

During the past year Sir William was said to have frequently urged his elder son's return, promising him a sufficient income if he would marry and settle as the heir to great estates should; but Laurence either did not like the lady of his father's selection, or else he found the sweets of liberty more precious than the bonds of Whinstane, howsoever shared and gilded; for hitherto he had invariably declined compliance. No one who knew the coarse, ruffianly man his father was, could wonder at his refusal. Mr. Anderside considered it wise in every way.

Oliver had married at three-and-twenty, and married satisfactorily to his father; but he lived

away from home, and thus perhaps the more easily kept on excellent terms with him. It was asserted that Sir William would have dearly liked to give him the privileges of an elder son over Laurence's head, but Colonel Warleigh had made the entail as strict as by law he could, and not one stick or stone about Penslaven or Whinstandale could be alienated without the heir's consent. Lucky for him that it could not.

About the girls Mr. Anderside could tell Rachel nothing; he had not seen them for years—never since Laurence went abroad for the first time. They went nowhere into society, not even to Bristowe, and were supposed to live secluded as nuns. *Girls*, the old man called them, but they were mature women; Katherine being twenty-four, and Grace only one year younger. In experience and knowledge of the world, however, they were mere children.

Lady Foulis, the old colonel's half-sister, was in being still, and still shut up in her turret at Whinstane where he left her. But that fire and fagot had ceased to burn upon the gallows' knowe, she might long ere this have made a weird witch-light in the world; for lapse of time had by no means sweetened her evil reputation, and when folks mentioned her name they uttered it with bated breath even yet.

Thus much of the popular history of the Warleighs, antecedent to the date of the Withers's return to Hurtleale, Mr. Anderside made known to his young friends, and it was pretty nearly all there was to tell, except what was conjectural.

V.

Sir William Warleigh's daughters were with him at the Hurtlemere House, as Mrs. Sara Grandage had told her god-child, and the next Sunday they appeared at church. On the following morning they called at the rectory; it was nearly ten years since Rachel had seen them, and they met almost like strangers.

The sisters had both grown up with their mother's proud, pure type of face, but they looked shy and shivery, like women who have never known the warm cherishing of affection. They appeared reserved, too—Katherine almost icily so—but Rachel fancied it was more from habit, and the life they led, than from natural disposition, and that it would wear off on longer acquaintance. John Withers was not at home when they called, but as Rachel felt sure that he would be disappointed at missing them, she begged them to stay to luncheon; but they declined, and seemed immediately rather in haste to be gone, which made her at once suspect that this was a stolen visit—and so it was. Just as they were taking leave, however, in John came, and a delay necessarily ensued. He had one or two reminiscences in common with them, which Rachel did not share; in particular they had Arthur Hill to talk about, and John was glad to hear later news of him than any he possessed.

By and by, Katherine thawed from her cold demeanor, and Grace spoke out with an almost childlike impulsiveness, when the newness of the meeting was got over. Grace had an exceedingly sweet, attractive smile, and only wanted a little more ease and vivacity to be charming; and from a certain expression and tone that betrayed her in speaking of Arthur Hill, Rachel

shrewdly imagined that, secluded as might be the existence she and her sister were condemned to they were not quite shut out from natural sympathies and interests. Finally, they were prevailed on to eat their luncheon at the rectory, and afterward John Withers and his sister walked with them over the fell, nearly as far as the Mere. Out of doors they expanded almost into sociability, checking themselves now and then as young people do who fear they are saying too much, or making themselves over-familiar. They both evidently possessed an undeveloped capacity for being happy, and tempers less high and elastic would have suffered far more than theirs had done from the unhealthy restraint and monotony of Whinstane. Throughout the whole conversation they never alluded once to any thing that was unusual in their position. They spoke of Laurence with great affection, and Grace hoped he would come home before Christmas; Katherine said nothing of her hopes, but from the sigh that followed her sister's words, Rachel felt sure she had no expectation of his return—perhaps, even, she did not desire it, or dreaded the renewal of the daily disputes that had embittered their lives when they were together formerly. Oliver was not mentioned amongst them.

That the events within their experience had been few, was manifest from the vividness with which they recalled several half-forgotten exploits to the minds of their early playfellows. Katherine asked if they remembered escaping with Laurence and herself to the Force, and paddling across the river, shoeless and stockingless, to be caught by their father on the other side, and marched home in disgrace. Rachel—a perfect tomboy in her childhood—recollected it well as a tragical incident, attended with penalties for disobedience, and serious warnings that they would all come to be drowned some day if they ventured on repeating the experiment; recollected that, and much more, when the chords of memory were thus pleasantly struck.

"Oh! yes, I remember," said she, her face brightening with the reflection of those sunny days. "We were very happy when we were little things. But that was a naughty prank, and we did grievous penance for it, John and I. Thenceforward we refrained from the river with its strong eddies and deep pools, and were content with the lesser dangers of the High-beck, where the slippery stepping-stones were a perpetual temptation and delight. I can hear mamma's gentle admonition now, 'Children, you had better come round by the bridge;' and nurse's shrill outcry of 'Bairns, I'll no' ha' you wetting your feet!' as we followed in single file over the perilous crags. Many a fall and many a ducking did we get when the beck was full, but we never gave up the stepping-stones until we gave up home and all. Oh! yes, I remember!"

Even during the short time they were together that morning, Rachel Withers found out that the tastes of her companions were as simple as their education had been narrow. "We have no accomplishments—we can read," said Katherine, with a peculiar smile, half sad, half mocking, on her beautiful lip. "We can read, and that is all." Yet two faces more refined and intelligent John Withers thought he had never seen.

They had just reached the stile into the fir-wood, and were preparing to part, with mutual expressions of pleasure at having renewed their acquaintance, when Sir William Warleigh confronted them, coming up the path with his gun over his shoulder, and his dogs at his heels. There was no time for evasion, and, perhaps, it was as well; though Katherine's heightened color and Grace's timid eye betrayed that their first impulse was to run away. He came close before he appeared to recognize John Withers and Rachel, and, touching his cap with ironical civility, was about to pass on without a word, when Katherine plucked up a sudden spirit, and asked if he had forgotten them. No, he had not forgotten them, replied the old bear, but he was after birds of another feather just then. And so he left them, looking uglier, more ungainly, and more inhospitable in Rachel's dismayed eyes than ever man looked before. To his daughters, his behavior was a mere matter of course.

"We shall come and see you again, if we may," Grace said, nervously; and Rachel replied that she should be glad to see them whenever they liked; on which Katherine bade her, if they did not present themselves at the rectory any more, understand that they might not walk so far alone—which both John and she felt implied the probability of Sir William's placing a veto on their acquaintance. And with that they parted.

VI.

Though Sir William Warleigh appeared to live in a state of chronic suspicion of servants, children, and all about him, he yet did not see fit to lay any restrictions on his daughters' visits to the rectory—a forbearance for which they seemed hardly able to account, though they took the fullest advantage of it. They were there nearly every day, and always found a warm welcome both from Rachel and her brother. It was so pleasant and cheering to be with them, Katherine said, that when the time came to go back to Whinstane, they should find the Tower lonelier and drearier than ever. They loved a good talk, and asked a thousand questions of the ways and manners of the world beyond the dales, which Rachel and, even John could answer but very imperfectly—cast as their lots had been in the quietest places. But they were curiously ignorant, and found matter for interest and speculation in the most trifling details. Katherine had the stronger mind of the two, but Grace had the tenderer character. Rachel was not mistaken in her sentimental conjectures: Grace and Arthur Hill had a sort of engagement pending between them, known to his friends, but not yet confessed to Sir William, and whether it would ever come to any thing Grace despondently doubted. Intimacy ripens fast amongst young people who begin it with a friendly disposition, and before the girls had known each other a week, they had had this tender subject under discussion a score of times.

In a recent letter to John Withers, Arthur Hill had told his story too, and asked his friend's counsel and opinion; but John, in reply, had declared himself utterly inexperienced, and would

not accept the responsibility of advising him on a matter so delicate and critical. This plea of inexperience was not likely to be worth much very long now, however, for John had begun to sing Katherine's praises in his sister's ears every hour of the day; and in their walks over the moor, to take the girls home after their visits to the rectory, they always paired off together, leaving Rachel and Grace to cultivate each other's conversation uninterruptedly.

One afternoon at this juncture, Mrs. Sara Grandage, driving over to the rectory to see her god-daughter, arrived at the moment when the sociable little group were about to set off to the Force. She, good-naturedly, refused to detain them then, but, to indemnify herself for the present disappointment, made them all promise to go to Prior's Bank to luncheon on the following day.

Rachel went in the morning early, but John had business on hand which kept him at home until afternoon; when he arrived at last, however, he found Katherine and Grace Warleigh both there, and sly old Bittersweet, from a wicked glance she gave him, betrayed herself as archly suspicious of his budding sentiments: he wondered whether Rachel had found him out, and had been saying any thing. But no, Rachel looked calm and innocent. Mr. Gilsland had dropped in, and she was holding a little chat very agreeably with him. Rachel was no spoilsport or premature meddler; she had far too much sympathy with her brother not to have put a just interpretation on his much-talk of Katherine, but she held her peace while she wished him good luck.

They were in the middle of the sitting when a carriage drove round to the door, and who should enter but Mrs. Damer Warleigh of Bristowe. Her face of pleased surprise as she scanned the gathering was delightful to behold, and when she got Rachel Withers to herself for a moment she whispered, squeezing her hand with great energy:

"My dear, if you can be kind to those poor girls, *do*."

Rachel replied that they all had the best disposition in the world to improve each other's acquaintance. Mrs. Damer then inquired if Sir William knew of it, and expressed her astonishment that he had not peremptorily commanded its discontinuance; she afterward, with Mrs. Sara Grandage's connivance, took Grace to talk to privately, and carried her off into the garden, where secrets were told and comfort administered. When they joined the party in the drawing-room a quarter of an hour later, Grace looked all the brighter and the better for her out-pouring in the shrubbery—Mrs. Damer had promised to befriend her cause when the time and opportunity arrived, and she might be relied on to do it.

She took her young kinswomen away with her when she left, and drove to the Hurtlemere House, though they warned her their father would not be found in-doors.

"So much the better if he is not," replied she, without the slightest circumlocution. "And so much the pleasanter for all of us. I shall have done my duty, and had my glimpse of you girls without any annoyance. Now tell me how you came to renew your acquaintance with John

Withers and his sister—I approve of it thoroughly.”

And they told her, the talk lasting all the way up the hill to the Hurltemere House, and as long as Mrs. Damer Warleigh's leisure would allow her to listen to them afterward.

Mrs. Sara Grandage was not the woman to lose the opportunity for a little social criticism when it fell in her way so conveniently as it did that afternoon; and as soon as the Bristowe carriage disappeared through the gates she began.

“The old generation is handsomer than the new—neither of those girls will ever match Mrs. Damer Warleigh,” said she, decisively.

John Withers admitted that she was a grand specimen of old lady-hood, but he maintained that Katherine was quite as fine-looking.

“Too pale and severe,” interposed Mr. Gilsland, in the tone of one who esteems himself a connoisseur. “I prefer a bright, sunshiny beauty, with more of color and less of the statuesque.”

Rachel's godmamma flashed a wicked glance in her face, and though, of course, the poor girl knew perfectly well that the handsome curate's remark could have no reference whatever to *her*, she felt herself blushing abominably. And Bittersweet's next words were not of a kind to cool her conscious cheeks. “You prefer the dumpling order of beauty then, Mr. Gilsland!” Now Dumpling was her pet name for Rachel, though she certainly had not qualified for it yet, whatever she might do, and the insinuation put her still further out of countenance.

“Well, yes; call it the dumpling order, if you like,” said he, “but rosebud order would be prettier and more correctly descriptive,” and then, either with or without intention, he looked aside at Rachel before her blush had gone down, and began making inquiries about Sir William Warleigh's reputed wealth.

“He is as rich as Croesus and as niggard as a Jew,” replied Mrs. Sara Grandage, with malicious meaning in her heart. “He can not but be rich, for his income is vast, and his expenditure nothing. Neither of his sons has an allowance from him, and I have heard him swear he never will give any man sixpence with his daughters. It would be a bad speculation to go wooing to Whinstane Tower, Mr. Gilsland, very bad.” And here Bittersweet paused, with her short, dry cough, which she contrived to make so significant.

As John Withers walked home with his sister in the cool of the evening, he was very silent, turning over some serious thought in his mind. At last he spoke, saying, reflectively:

“I am not sure that I like that Mr. Gilsland, Rachel; do you find him a pleasant person?”

Rachel said, “Yes,” but nothing more aloud. In fact, she had conceived some slight prepossession in the handsome curate's favor, and her brother's question startled her.

“So John does not like him—I wonder why,” she thought within herself; but no solution of his dislike presented itself to her, and she passed an evening of secret uneasiness and perplexity.

VII.

When Katherine Warleigh told Rachel Withers that she and her sister possessed no accom-

plishments, she spoke literally. No attempt had been made to give them the elegant education suited to their rank; they could not dance, or draw, or play, or sing, or understand any language but their own; in that, however, they were so well versed that John Withers declared them to be the best informed women in their national literature that he had ever met with. Katherine and he held long discussions on history, poetry, and romance, and with Grace's appropriate quotations chiming in, the trio were really very delightful for an ignoramus like Rachel to listen to. While those girls had browsed at large and at will in a vast library of good authors, she had been drilling in the bald routine of classes. Sometimes she was more than half inclined to wish she could exchange her own careful training and pruning for their luxuriant neglect; but John encouraged her to supply her deficiencies in a methodical way, and promised her a fair meed of success if she would devote a portion of each day to a regular course of study under his direction. This she gladly acceded to; for she felt very vacant-minded amongst well-read people. But school-brag girls always do; in fact, they have only just learned how to learn when they are launched on the world as finished and polished specimens of womankind.

The month of August was now getting over fast, and soon the rectory would lose its pleasant visitors—pleasant they were in every sense of the word. They had an air of taking refuge with Rachel as it were, though she was so much younger than themselves; and with John's aid she cheered them infinitely. They were not like the same women they were a few weeks back; they looked not only brighter in spirits, but better in health.

“Oh! Whinstane is a weariful, weariful place,” said Katherine one day, in a moment of sudden expansion. “I wish we were remaining at the Hurltemere House through the winter, that we might keep the benefit of your society.”

John Withers and his sister heartily echoed the wish.

On another occasion she said to Rachel:

“If we can obtain leave to invite you to the Tower, will you come?”

The question took Rachel by surprise, and she glanced across at John who, for the instant, seemed as much startled as herself. Katherine saw the effect her unexpected demand had had on both, and, sighing, added hurriedly:

“Perhaps it is useless to talk about any thing so improbable. No one ever has been invited to Whinstane within my memory, and papa is not more hospitable than formerly.”

Nothing further was said on the subject then, but afterward, when John and Rachel were alone, he asked her if she should hesitate about going to Whinstane were the chance given her. “Because,” continued he, “I wish for my sake you could and would.”

“For your sake, Johnny?” echoed Rachel, with a little pretense of ignorance to draw him out; and then he began to speak of Katherine, and to tell her how he believed she was the one woman in the world who would make his life happy.

“Not yet. I have no intention of marrying

yet," he ran on. "I am not even sure that she cares for me or would consent if I asked her."

Rachel was of opinion that she would, however; she thought the attraction was mutual; but she did not know that it would be right for her to say so, therefore she only reassured him with a promise that she would not be instrumental in ending their friendship by refusing to do any thing in reason that might be required of her.

Whinstane Tower by all accounts could not be the most delightful place in the world to stay at, especially for a person so sensitive to the proprieties of life as Rachel Withers; but the risk of having to go there did not appear very imminent at present; therefore, though she would have done that and much more to please John or forward his interests, she set her mind at ease about it. But her brother continued to cherish the idea, and founded on it a good many agreeable visions. Since Sir William Warleigh had been pleased to give a tacit consent to his daughters' intimacy at the rectory, it was within the range of possibilities that he might encourage it elsewhere. They had all met him one evening on the fells a long distance from home, and he had condescended so far as to inform them that there was a storm coming on. And it came—a terrific thunder-storm—before they could gain any shelter. This thunder-storm it was that brought John Withers's feelings to a crisis, and his wits to a distinct determination about his future life—Katherine was so beautifully calm through the danger, while Rachel was stunned and Grace nearly frightened to death. He had not *fallen in love*, as the saying is, but he knew that Katherine suited him; he was nearly thirty years old, and what he wanted in a wife was not a mere pretty sweeting or a house-proud mother dignity, but a pleasant and intelligent companion; and this she had the capacity to be to him more than any woman he had ever seen.

It would now have greatly relieved him to know what might be Sir William Warleigh's views about marrying his daughters; and this he saw no readier means of learning than through his sister's keeping up at Whinstane the intimacy that had opened so promisingly at Hurtleddale.

VIII.

Mrs. Sara Grandage always gave three garden entertainments to her many friends during the continuance of the warm long days, and on the twenty-ninth of August she issued her invitations for the last picnic of the season; fixing it for the fourth of September. The mountain-ash berries were red ripe already—earliest sign of the coming cold; and harvest once over, winter came down on Hurtleddale almost immediately.

There are few days long anticipated and anticipated with eager pleasure that do not turn out more or less of disappointments—and such a day was this to John Withers and Sir William Warleigh's daughters.

"We shall not fail to be there," were Katherine's last words on the previous evening when she parted with her friends at the stile leading into the fir-wood, and on reaching Prior's Bank the first news they heard was, "You will not see your friends from the Hurtleddale House to-

day—they went off to Whinstane before six o'clock this morning. One of Sir William's vicious caprices, I suppose!"

Of course, John's pleasure in the day was gone, but Rachel made shift to enjoy it. Several old friends were there whom they had not yet seen since their return to Hurtleddale—the Grantleys, Carltons, and Mr. Crofts, the gray curate, amongst the number, he in faithful attendance on his cruel Kitty Anderside. And Mr. Gilsland also appeared, though he had disquieted Rachel's thoughts by telling her beforehand he was afraid he should not be able to come; disquieted poor Rachel's thoughts that ran on the handsome curate now far more than was discreet.

She could not quite make out why he was not more popular in Hurtleddale. Every body allowed that he was clever and gentlemanlike, but he was nowhere very cordially received. Only a few days ago at the rectory, Mr. Anderside, in speaking of him to John, had said before her, "Gilsland does not get on well with the people; they do not like his ways any more than he likes theirs; and I fear the fault lies with him." Now that struck her as unjust: why should the fault lie with him any more than with them? or why should it not, as faults mostly do, lie on both sides equally?

He was not in his right place, and he could not help feeling it and betraying that he felt it, she said in his excuse; and it was not very surprising that, after a public school and brilliant college life, a young man should find a narrow country society irksome. The only trait in him that seemed to her unnatural was that he had so little faith in himself or in his future prospects. He appeared to have made up his mind already that he should live and die a poor, obscure, neglected curate; and poverty with obscurity wore the guise of terrible evils to him. He and Rachel had met very frequently on the neutral territory of Prior's Bank, which was about midway between Brafferton and the rectory, and whenever they had met he had poured out to her his desires, ambitions, dissatisfactions and grievances with a very fluent eloquence. She was a tender-hearted creature and had plenty of sympathy at his service. Not so Mrs. Sara Grandage—she had not common patience with him.

"What he wants is to walk straightway into some fat living, and to sit down in lazy dignity for the rest of his days," she said, very tartly on one occasion, after he had entertained Rachel and herself with half an hour of complainings. "He is an inveterate grumbler and discontented person. What is he or what has he that he should pretend to be above his position here? Let him deserve a higher and he will get it." Bittersweet had had a varied experience of life, and she always declared that people earned their precise deserts; they won what they were worth, and if they were worth nothing they won nothing. Rachel heard, but refused to accept this article of her godmother's worldly creed without further observation with her own spectacles, because it bore hard on the unsuccessful and unlucky, whose lot, she thought, was heavy enough already without that last straw to break their backs; but there might be a general truth in it too, she candidly allowed.

Rachel was a commonplace person herself,

not given to chimerical troubles, and always preferring to behold the bright side of things; but that was temperament, constitutional cheerfulness, or what not. She would not have said that fainting was affectation because she never fainted, or that hysterics were rubbish because she could not have gone off into a fit if she had tried, or that low spirits were fancy because her own were tolerably equal; yet she had heard each and all of these assertions made by the non-afflicted. One step at a time in life is enough for most persons with the pleasures of hope before, but there are some who can not rest content unless a good prospect lie assured in front. Of these last was Mr. Gilsland, Rachel said, and people called him self-seeking and disagreeable, because he was ill at ease in a circle where he did not feel himself appreciated, and where he had no expectation of a change for the better. In a congenial sphere, and amongst congenial friends, she was sure he would be a pleasant friend himself. It almost provoked her to hear him spoken against—even John was not fair to him, and had begun to declare that he was a weariness to his spirit whenever he joined him for a walk on the moors.

"Of course," she went on, a little hotly and hurriedly, when she saw the shrewd sarcasm with which Bittersweet heard her; "of course it is always wisest and safest to keep our little trials to ourselves, and not draw too often on the charity and consideration of our neighbors. Sunshine is very naturally preferred to shade, and those people go fastest and farthest who apply themselves to making things smooth and pleasant in this world. Perhaps Mr. Gilsland will by and by learn the wisdom of not seeking sympathy from such as have none to spare, and of practicing silence about those aspirations and desires which all the wishing in the universe will not satisfy. John advises him to work, work, work, as the best and only means of filling his mind and his time, and thus excluding discontented reveries; but John does not perceive that Mr. Gilsland has none of his vigor, energy, or love for active labor. They are differently made. John throws himself into his duty with all the eagerness that others spend in the pursuit of pleasure, and his duty is absolute pleasure to him, dear good fellow that he is; but to Mr. Gilsland the same routine is the worst monotony of boredom!" Rachel was quite out of breath between tears and excitement when she came to the end of this little oration, and Mrs. Sara Grandage, in her amazed vexation at what her emotion betrayed, found not a single word at the moment wherewith to answer her. Rachel had excellent grounds for what she stated respecting Mr. Gilsland's views of work; only the day before, with a rueful smile, he had given her a very explicit description of his labors and his feelings.

"On Sunday," said he, "I preach twice to the barbarians who nod and yawn in my very face or sit open-mouthed and expectant, as if my words were tangible things to be physically swallowed and digested. Some few wave their heads with responsive groanings that make me imagine myself in Little Bethel, and the school-master tattoos rapidly on the boys' heads to keep them awake. When it is over, I go to my lodgings, depressed with the idea that not one

soul of my congregation is the wiser or the better for any word of mine. I do not know how to address these uncultured people; I have not the key to their prejudices or their tastes. I can not be with them hail-fellow-well-met, like worthy Mr. Anderside, who goes into their cottages, and talks about their children, the pigs, the potato crops, and the complaints with as much interest and eloquence as he would bestow on matters of real significance. One old soul tells me at every visit that all her aches and pains proceed from 'habstraction on the brain!' and another has an unending source of lamentation in her 'poor, dear inside.' It is my business to listen and comfort, but I listen and am dumb. I had no vocation for the Church, and I ought never to have entered it."

Rachel did not ask him why then he had entered it. It struck on her very painfully that his heart was not in his work, and she knew as well as any body that such work as his can not be well done without good heart. She believed him conscientious, she understood the permanence of the holy orders he had taken upon himself, and she overflowed with feelings of pity and kindness toward him. So when her god-mamma Grandage or any one else spoke of his shortcomings in duty or his general discontent, she rallied to his defense, and said her say in spite of them all. But if this good and guileless damsel was deceived in the estimate she formed of the handsome curate's character, other persons were shrewd enough to take him at his just value, and that value was by no means a high one.

Mr. Gilsland spoke truly when he said that he had no vocation for the Church; he had none—none whatever. It was his vocation to be a gentleman, or what he esteemed such; and he had gone into orders as the shortest and readiest cut to the position. Of mean birth, but as a boy very beautiful and talented, he had found wealthy patrons; he had made his way through a public school and had gone to college with an exhibition. There, so far as scholarship went, he did well, but his conduct was not such as secures the confidence of friends. He had earned the reputation of being a slippery person. Braferton was now his third curacy, and he was as far from preferment as ever. The sphere did not satisfy him; he felt his powers wasted there, he was ambitious of great things, but he was far too much in haste ever to achieve permanent success.

A mood of profound discouragement was upon him at the time when John Withers and his sister returned to Hurtleale. Rachel crossed his path, and a new road to honor opened before him. He cast his eyes on her with mixed motives. In the first place she belonged to the class of old-fashioned gentle-folks with whom he was not, nor ever would be, cater-cousins; in the second, she had money—gossip had magnified it into quite a pretty fortune; and in the third, she was a gentle, pleasing person, young and fresh, in whom he should no doubt have skill to develop all wifely virtues. He thought about her often, and soon fancied himself well on the way to winning her favor. So he was unfortunately—Rachel's heart was caught between pity and sympathy, and was ready for a surrender. He made a little sentimental pre-

tense with himself and protested that he had fallen in love with her too—but it was that sort of falling which has an eye to ultimate safety. He had looked and implied a lover's "*trust me!*" but he had never uttered a word that Rachel could hold as a pledge that he was not fooling her. Fooling her; the wicked thought never entered her honest little head or caused her honest little heart a single pang! People might think and say of him what they liked, but for her part, she knew him to be an excellent, delightful, most misunderstood, and misplaced person—and when she said this she was in earnest.

People have such different ways of thinking and feeling! Rachel remembered when they left Hurtleale and John went to his curacy in Wales, how they would have esteemed it one of the happiest events possible could he have had the office Mr. Gilsland now held; but there never was a chance of such luck for him. The gray curate had possessed it in peace and thankfulness for nearly twenty years, and was a man of fifty before he got his parsonage in the Potteries.

After Mrs. Sara Grandage's party, by the by, it was circulated amongst the gossips that Kitty Anderside had reconsidered her decision, and was going to join Mr. Crofts in his new cure after all. She said to excuse herself—though indeed she needed no excuse—that they had worked together so long at Brafferton that she could not get on alone; and so had come to the conclusion of going to help him where he was. Rachel heartily wished her well, though *she* too had her little stone to cast at Mr. Gilsland; it was brought to her sensitive ears that Kitty had actually been heard to call him a "pragmatical puppy;" but she could not quite believe it. "Pragmatical puppy," did not sound like one of Kitty's gentle phrases—nevertheless, it was a fact that Kitty said it.

IX.

It is always a rather melancholy time out of doors when the dead leaves are rustling on the roads and rotting in the ditches; but Rachel Withers enjoyed the long evenings with the curtains drawn and fire and lamp ablaze; especially she enjoyed them when her brother had a friend staying in the house. When the real winter set in with frost and snow, they were rather too far out of the world for visiting much; but sometimes Mr. Anderside came over for a night, and sometimes Mr. Gilsland, and a third face made a cheerful variety by their hearth. It did John good too—his sister was convinced of it, though he professed to like quite as well being alone; which was, to say the least of it, inhospitable. But the fact was, he gave a world of thought just then to Katherine Warleigh, all the more thought perhaps that she did not keep her promise of writing. Six lines to tell Rachel why they had left the Hurtlemer House so suddenly was all she had received since they returned to Whinstane Tower.

That John should dream of her was natural enough, and Rachel would have been the last person in the world to complain of such pre-occupation had it not made him unsocial with other people. He positively *would not* ask Mr. Gilsland to stay one gloomy October afternoon, though Rachel was sure he expected an invitation, and went away disappointed; and when

she ventured to say it was hardly civil, he cut her quite short, declaring that he did not want Mr. Gilsland coming to the Rectory so often.

So often? when it was she did not know how long since his last call! Ten days, said John, but she was sure it must be more. And for her part, she added with a little air of dignity, she liked guests about the house. It was not as if they were poor and could not afford to entertain them; *then* she should not care. And with that she retired to her own room, and perhaps shed a few tears as she pictured to herself the handsome curate breasting his lonely way over the moors against the wind, through the six dreary miles that stretched between the churlish Rectory and his dull lodgings in Brafferton.

Another day about this period she had a brisk passage of words with Mrs. Sara Grandage on the same subject. Bittersweet took upon herself to ask her goddaughter what she *could* see in Mr. Gilsland.

"He has a long figure, a pretty face, and looks like Ahsalom," said she in her quizzing fashion. "Put him on lilac kid gloves and a diamond ring on his finger, and give him a perfumed handkerchief to use at pathetic moments, and you have the very sweetest picture of a pet parson."

So truly ill-natured of her, Rachel retorted; as if he chose his own face or could help being handsome!

But that was just Bittersweet's way—when she conceived an antipathy to any person, she could not acknowledge a single virtue or merit he had.

"What do I see in him? What does any body see in any body? What does he see in me, that he should always peer over a roomful with his short-sighted eyes until he discovers my place, when he makes straight for it as if there were nobody else present? And sometimes I wish he would not, for it is so marked—though you need not fancy I am ashamed of his attentions; for I am *very* far from *that*! I am not witty, or pretty, or in any way entertaining beyond other young women, yet apparently he prefers my society to theirs. And why should not I prefer his? I always do like people who show a liking for me, and I always shall!" cried Miss Defiance, with her head aloft.

Then she told her godmamma very irreverently that 'she was welcome to have her fancies and delusions like the rest of the world, but it was perfectly preposterous for her or any body to accuse Mr. Gilsland of having an eye to her little shred of a fortune.

"And it is uncivil to me, too," added she, indignantly; "for if I am no better than other girls, neither am I conspicuously worse. Why may I not be supposed to have some small attractions of my own, besides pounds, shillings, and pence?"

Bittersweet enjoyed her wrath and actually had the—what shall I call it?—the *abominable*—ness to say to her face:

"You are cut out for an old maid, Dumpling. Don't marry, and I'll leave you a nice little fortune; marry, and I'll cut you off with a shilling!"

To tell any girl at eighteen she is cut out for an old maid! If that is not sin, what is?

Oh! how Rachel fired up!

"How dare you say that, godmamma? And you married yourself!" cried she.

"So I did, but it is a long while ago, and I knew no better. I would not marry *now*, I assure you."

"You are an old woman, you are a hundred! And it is a shame of you to speak against marrying when all the world makes a proverb for goodness of your husband's name!"

"He was a very philosophical person."

"I should think he had need to be!" retorted Mistress Rachel, with epigrammatic point. Bittersweet only laughed and the laugh brought her goddaughter back to good-humor. "Perhaps," said she more calmly, "I am rather formal and Dutch to look at, but I am not *all* starch! I am sure I could be very fond of somebody who was fond of me, and to elect myself one of St. Catherine's maids before I am twenty—*No*. You may promise me your nice little fortune ten years hence if you choose, but I'll make no treaty for it with you now! I would not if there were no Mr. Gilsland in the world! Not marry, indeed!" and the young woman went off as stately as Queen Elizabeth's ruff.

Independently of her own marrying or letting it alone, Rachel Withers thoroughly enjoyed a wedding. People might say what they liked about weddings being dull, melancholy, and so forth, but she liked to see them; and when she was asked toward the end of October to hold the gloves at Kitty Anderside's, she was proud and delighted to accept the invitation.

She told Mrs. Sara Grandage afterward that she could not imagine what made the women cry at weddings, and what they got into such a state of tremulous excitement for. "It is always a risk, they say tragically. *Risk!* it could not have been much of a risk for Kitty Anderside or Mr. Crofts, who have been friends and neighbors for twenty years; yet her kinsfolk wept as if she were going to be carried to execution instead of to a comfortable parsonage amongst the Potteries. I was glad to see she had more sense than to cry herself, and Mr. Crofts looked quite spruce and jubilant, only his clothes fitted so ill. Kitty wore pearl gray satin and a bonnet—a wreath and a veil would have been absurd at her age, you know—and very nice and pleasant she was, trying to make every body feel as happy and as much at their ease as herself."

John Withers and his sister went over to Brafferton the evening before the wedding when there was a family dinner-party, and a full gathering of friends out of the town afterward. The entertainment was rather dull and whispery, and Mr. Gilsland was not there. Rachel could not help thinking how much more lively and agreeable a good dance would have made every thing—but dancing was quite tabooed in the Andersides' circle.

They had a beautiful morning for the wedding, and the church was crowded; all the school-children forming double lines of rosy faces up the center aisle. Nothing particular happened except that old Miss Briggs, who was second bridesmaid, was taken faint, and had to be led into the vestry by John; she said to excuse herself that the ceremony was so *awful*.

And it did sound very solemn even to Rachel when she heard it read in church. She wondered how people who make marriages of convenience could stand and listen to that service; she thought there ought to be something special for their occasions and quite different.

After breakfast the bride and bridegroom set off on their journey home to the Parsonage amongst the Potteries, and there was another gathering in the evening—including the curate—which was by many degrees more cheerful than that of the night before. People seemed to have got a weight off their spirits, and though conversation was still the sole amusement, they recovered their natural voices and ventured to use them without dread of being considered unfeeling—an inexpressible relief to the bridesmaids.

X.

One morning about midway the month of December a letter arrived at the rectory containing the much-talked-of invitation to Whinstane, which Rachel had given up as forgotten and done with two months ago. It was Grace Warleigh who wrote, but Katherine added a postscript seconding her wishes very cordially.

"Can you come as soon as Christmas Day is turned and remain with us a fortnight?" she said. "Papa made no demur when we asked him this unusual favor; had we imagined he would consent so readily we should have begged for it long ere this."

John Withers kept his eyes on his sister with a wistful earnestness as she read these lines aloud, and said when she reached the end of them, "You will go, Rachel?" to which she answered: "Oh! yes, to be sure!" as if she quite enjoyed the idea; which she certainly did not, much as she liked their friends. But any thing to please John; so her acceptance was written and dispatched forthwith.

They had had a steady, dull time during the previous three weeks at the Rectory; for the winter had set in with terrible snow-storms, and kept every body prisoners at home. A poor old hawker had been found one Sunday morning frozen to death in the narrow lane between Deepgyll and the Force, his pack under his head, and his body half buried in the drift. The roads were almost impassable except on horseback, and the fells were one vast dazzling blank of snow. There was another heavy fall on the day Grace Warleigh's letter came, which leveled the churchyard graves, and wrapt them in beautiful new winding-sheets for Christmas. It did not appear very clear to Rachel how, under these circumstances, she was to get to Whinstane Tower, eighteen miles off; but John coolly said:

"Where there was a will there was a way," and after that, of course, she knew she should go, even though she might have to fly through the air on a broomstick!

Rachel's own little affairs had made no particular progress since Kitty Anderside's wedding. She had only seen Mr. Gilsland once during the drear month of November, when she met him accidentally in a shop at Brafferton; he was very pleasant, as usual, but also, as usual, had a little grievance—he could not procure any fresh butter. Rachel wished he did not

make so much ado about trifles—John would have eaten dry bread for a twelvemonth before he would have dreamt of complaining to Katherine Warleigh! However, she promised to speak to Robb's wife at the mill to send him some, though she knew it was very scarce, and not good at this season when the cows could get no grass. The winter had fair to be one of more than common severity; the hollies were scarlet with berries even *then* for the frozen-out birds, which was always taken in Hurtledeale as a sign of hard weather that would continue late and long.

But that malicious old Bittersweet defeated Rachel's kindly efforts for the curate's creature-comforts; she saw her a day or two after her embassy to the miller's wife, and cried, mockingly, wagging her head: "I have disappointed Mr. Gilsland of his butter, Dumpling; I want every ounce dame Robb can make, and she dare not offend me by selling it elsewhere. I am delighted to teach him a lesson of self-denial, and I hope he may profit by it. Have you got a lock of his lovely hair yet? Good-by, my dear, and keep up your spirits!"

Since this, Rachel had not seen the curate either at home or abroad; but only two days before Christmas, John, returning from Brafferton toward dusk, called her into his study for a bit of serious conversation. He had been over to the Andersides', where he had met Mr. Gilsland, and they had had some talk together. "Some grave talk, Rachel, and about *you*," he told her, and then stopped short, looking not a little vexed. After a minute's pause, he asked, abruptly:

"Do you really feel that you can care for that man, Rachel?"

Rachel did not answer him; she felt her color come and go, and something rising in her throat as if it would choke her. John was kind and considerate, but he was woefully disappointed; and there was a touch of impatience in his voice, as he said, without pushing her to a confession: "Then, I suppose, I must make him welcome here more frequently. I will not assume the responsibility of thwarting your fancy, but I wish it had been for any body else!"

Rachel had been forced to see, almost from the beginning of their acquaintance, that her brother did not like Mr. Gilsland, and as he was not apt to take up unfounded prejudices, she now begged him to give her his reasons for it. He could not exactly state to her one. Mr. Gilsland's personal and professional character were fair, he allowed; and his means would, doubtless, improve; his connections were unknown, but then a man is himself, and not his family. No, he did not object to him on the score of his birth, though he should have preferred seeing his sister marry a gentleman of condition equal to her own, but he was afraid his temper was *queer*!

"All our tempers are queer sometimes," rejoined Rachel, and the effort of speaking brought back her self-possession.

Finally, John said, Mr. Gilsland had appealed to him, as his sister's natural guardian, to permit his visits at the Rectory, and that he did not feel he had a right to forbid them if they were agreeable to her. "We have always thought you a little woman of sense," added he, more

cheerfully, perceiving that poor Rachel was a little cast down by his opinion of her lover, "and if you do not approve of him on closer acquaintance, you can depute me to tell him so. There need be no engagement yet, understand that distinctly: you must know each other better first. He will have no opportunity of seeing you before you go to Whinstane, so think the matter over while you are there, and if you return home in your present frame of mind, then he shall have leave to come."

If her brother had appeared in the least degree pleased with her prospects, Rachel would have been proud and happy beyond measure; but, as it was, she felt fretted with a host of uncomfortable fears. Still, atop of them all, there sang in her heart, ever and anon, that rejoicing cry, "He loves me! I knew he did, I knew he did!" which drowns every other voice when it gets an utterance. John might be grave, and Bittersweet might be sarcastic, but they could only ruffle her on the surface while she had that balm of comfort within.

And as soon as Christmas Day and the school-feast were over, Rachel packed up her traps, left John to the tender mercies of Mary Deane and Phemie, who promised to take good care of him in her absence, and departed to Whinstane in the jingling Brafferton chaise, and in a most enviable mood of mind. She had received her first letter from Mr. Gilsland, and had answered it with joyous sincerity, and also she had received a letter from Bittersweet, whom John had apprised of the crisis in his sister's affairs. In this letter, Rachel was apostrophized as "a bewitched duckling, ready to run straight into reynard's mouth, with a quack of tragical glee, directly he opened it!" and informed that her godmamma only waited her decision to send for her lawyer to alter her will.

The young woman consulted her dignity, and said she *might wait*.

CHAPTER THE SECOND.

AT WHINSTANE TOWER.

NONE serve him but constrained things whose hearts are absent. SHAKESPEARE.

I.

RACHEL WITHERS could hardly believe that it was real; she felt as if at any moment she might have woke up out of her dream, and have found herself back at the homely, comfortable rectory. But, no, she was verily at Whinstane Tower. Katherine Warleigh was in the adjoining room, probably fast asleep, and the droning of Lady Poullis's organ drifted with the sobs of the night gusts eerily round about the walls. From the fullness of the sound, Rachel knew that she must be playing with her window wide, even at that hour and in that bitter frost. Was the woman insensible to cold, or were these midnight misereres to the winds of heaven parts of an unfinished penance?

Rachel had passed by the foot of her private staircase that day, and had seen her servant coming down—a dumb, old, faithful-looking soul, who was, perhaps, the only soul alive, besides herself, who knew the core of her mystery. Even Sir William Warleigh had no distinct understanding of it. She had come back to Whin-

stane, after a year or two's absence, just about the time when he was brought thither, and had begun living then precisely as she was living now, only she was young at that date, and at this she was old. The dales' world gossiped about her awfully long ago, but, when it had said its say, seeing her no more, forgot her; the new generation rarely heard her name, or heard it only as the echo of an unintelligible tragedy.

Katherine and Grace Warleigh, familiar with the idea of her ever since they were born, had neither interest nor curiosity on the matter. At very long intervals, when they were children, Lady Foulis sent for them, and they went reluctantly. She had possession of the easternmost turret for her life, and, on a stated day of the year, Sir William saw her to pay her her income, which was charged on the Penslaven lands. She was not mad, the girls assured Rachel, whatever else she might be; and Katherine said she was certainly one of the old race—a genuine Warleigh, born and bred; for she had the noble features, the full lips, and the resplendent dark eyes that gleamed from many a stately canvas in the picture-gallery. She was a papist, and Grace's pet theory concerning her was that she had been a nun, and had fled her convent with some lover—loved not wisely, but too well—and that being overtaken by swift remorse for her broken vows, she had thenceforth given herself up to a voluntary imprisonment. This speculation was as near the truth—and as far from it—as many another that hovered round the mystery of her name.

The life at Whinstane was, indeed, a life of weariful stagnation—Rachel Withers could not have endured it very long. They went down in the morning to a surly breakfast in the gray twilight—for Sir William kept the earliest hours, and allowed no voice but his own to be heard as he read his paper. They munched their toast in silence, and made signals for sugar, or butter, or bacon with the most stealthy carefulness, and if in their transit to and fro the table, any vessel clinked against another, his scowl was almost as savage as a blow. Yet Grace declared he was quite in a genial mood for him since the news had come that Oliver's wife had brought him a little son; perhaps the good effect of it was wearing off now, however; for it was a month old when Rachel arrived at the Tower; and he had begun to be desperately impatient to hear from Laurence, in answer to a most magnanimous proposal that he considered he had made him; and his vexation each morning when the post-bag yielded up nothing but the daily paper, was very apparent.

After breakfast was over, the young women wandered into the wilderness of a library, and cowered round the fire within the screen, talking in whispers—nobody at Whinstane seemed to dare to speak in a natural tone except Sir William, and Rachel was fast catching the timid habit. There they monotonized until nearly noon, when they went into the park, and marched up and down a path that had been swept for them in the snow. The first morning they walked as far as the rectory, and saw Mrs. Hill for ten minutes—an event which had brightened Grace ever since. She read a letter from Arthur, and communicated a message to his mother for reply, and with this crumb of com-

fort was refreshed beyond belief. Rachel wrote to John afterward, and Katherine looked over her shoulder for a minute or two while she was doing so, but she sent no message to him; perhaps she was too shy, his sister thought, and then wondered whether she really liked him; they were not long enough together for any very profound attachment to be formed—if a reasonable affection be an affair of time; but she believed sincerely that only opportunity lacked to accomplish in Katherine's mind what was already past changing in John's.

Luncheon made an incident in the middle of the day. Sir William always presented himself at the table if he were about the house, and questioned his daughters straightly as to where they had been and what they had done since breakfast, invariably sneering and growling over the summary. They were not allowed to interfere in the village school, or to share any part of Mrs. Hill's parish work. There was not one kind duty or office toward their poorer neighbors in which they might engage. No Christmas bounties were dispensed from the Tower as from other great houses, and so cruelly strict was Sir William's rule that never a cottager of all his laboring tenants would have dared to gather a fagot of broken sticks to warm his frozen hearth. There was no hunting just now because of the hard weather, but when the meet was anywhere in the neighborhood, the girls were forbidden to stir beyond the flower-gardens. If Sir William had been the tenderest father in the world, he could not have testified more care over their every movement than he did; but his watchfulness arose from his habits of mean suspicion, not out of an anxious natural affection, and it was irksome accordingly.

The afternoon was always inexpressibly long and slow. The wintry sky looked too heavy, dreary, and cloud-laden to tempt any one forth a second time in the day, and when luncheon was over, the girls betook themselves to the library again, and crooned through the old stories till it was dark. All the witch legends, ghost tales, and secret family traditions of the dales had found a storehouse in Katherine's brain, and she delighted in airing her musty possessions. This weird chat lasted them until dinner, which was as silent and cheerless a meal as breakfast. After that they saw Sir William no more, and what became of him Rachel did not care to inquire. They retreated to the screened library hearth and the eerie phantom talk; and at ten o'clock they were supposed to go to their rooms, and they did go; and there Rachel shivered and wrote down in her little locked diary the no-events of the day until the pen dropt from her stiffened fingers; for a fire was not allowed to her in her chamber, and her friends were stinted to an inch of candle. Their maid was a perfectly respectful, disagreeable spy of a woman, who executed Sir William's will as sternly as a jailer.

Oh! any way of escape from such a life would be a change for the better! Rachel Withers would rather have been the humblest working-woman in the world, free to come and go, to speak and breathe, than either of these two imprisoned creatures. They did not look so handsome as when they were in Hurtleale, and enjoyed an occasional outlet for themselves.

Their features were drawn and set querulously, their eyes were scared, plaintive, anxious, watchful. Surely the despotism of a household tyrant is the chief curse women can have to groan under! All of cruelty that rumor attributed to Sir William Warleigh fell short of what Rachel saw his daughters daily endure. Filial obedience to such a man could be no longer a duty; Laurence had broken from his yoke, Oliver diplomatically evaded it, and the sooner Katherine and Grace found deliverance from his mastership the happier for all of them! With his leave or without his leave, Rachel hoped and trusted that when the day came that Arthur Hill and her brother John could give them good homes and kind protection, they would go without scruple or hesitation to the care of those who loved them, and who would make their lives worth living. And this doctrine she preached as well as believed; perhaps, if Sir William had been aware of it, he would not have made her the welcome guest she was.

II.

Laurence Warleigh was married—the news reached Whinstane Tower on the morning of New Year's Day.

Sir William had just sworn at Katherine and dragged the breakfast-table aslant toward the fire when Nichols, the butler, brought in the post-bag. His master snatched it roughly out of the man's hands, and flung it upon the rug, where Grace was kneeling to warm her thin shivering person; bidding her open it and give him his *Times*, and look if there were any letter from Laurence. Meanwhile he applied himself to the strong ale and game-pie with which he was accustomed to lay the foundation of his ogre's breakfast; and when his son's missive was timidly handed to him, he only laid down his knife and fork to break the seal and flatten the sheet of paper open on the table, and then resumed his weapons that he might satisfy his hunger and his curiosity at one and the same time. His daughters watched his countenance furtively as he read, and saw it change from its animal coarseness and quiescence to a purple and bloated rage. When he opened his mouth, it was to stutter out a volley of frightful oaths which made the young women quail and avert their heads; and having read the document to an end, he tore it furiously in two, flung it toward the fire, and leaving his meal unfinished, dashed out of the room.

Rachel Withers held herself aloof while his daughters brought their pale, terrified faces together, and speculated in whispers on what Laurence's new offense could be; but not until they saw their father galloping down the avenue at the top of his horse's speed, did they venture to take up the fragments of their brother's letter, and read it. Katherine sighed as she perused the scant lines, and said the letter had given Laurence some trouble to write, and was not very conciliatory in tone. How could it be conciliatory? pleaded Grace, and then they talked low and hopelessly on the further estrangement that was sure to ensue; the younger sister wishing that Oliver were at home to prevent it, and the elder professing to believe that his interference would do more harm than good.

Considering the importance of the intelligence

that Laurence Warleigh's letter conveyed, it was very cool, brief, and explicit; but considering also the terms on which he stood with his father it was as respectful as such unwelcome news could possibly be. The young man began by saying that the subject of his epistle would surprise, and perhaps displease, Sir William, but as concealment would now be equally wrong and futile he had written to apprise him of his marriage with a young and lovely woman, the orphan and only daughter of Captain Gwynne, a naval officer, who had died in her childhood, bequeathing her to the care of his mother, the only near relative she had. She was a Roman Catholic, but a sincere, pious, good girl as ever breathed; without fortune, but of simple tastes and habits. He wound up by mentioning that for the present they proposed making their home at the Hurltemere House, and by expressing a hope that his sisters would be permitted to visit them there. And that was all—he acknowledged no breach of authority, and seemed quite unconscious of any pardon being needed for what he had done.

"Think of the Hurltemere House in winter," whispered Grace, drawing her breath with a shudder through her closed teeth; "that great pine wood at the back, and nothing but the tarn and snowy fells to look out upon. They ought to be very much in love to support that intolerable dreariness—I hope they are!"

"I wish Laurence had not married in a corner as if he were ashamed of his choice," said Katherine.

"Poor fellow!" sighed Grace; "he was so persecuted—home was made so miserable to him."

"Not more miserable than to us," responded her sister; and then they fell into a dreary silence, and stood looking out at the skeleton trees of the avenue and the snow-buried undulations of the park, where had reigned for nearly a month past as black a frost as any within the memory of Whinstandale.

Sir William returned home at noon, his rage cowed down, but full of a malignant disappointment and an implacable spite. From the wrathful ejaculations that frothed over while he sat with his daughters and guest at luncheon they gathered that he had been to his agent to try what he could do to punish his offending son, and that he had come back with the mortifying assurance that he could do nothing. Afterward he bade Katherine write to her brother Oliver, and command his immediate presence at Whinstane.

"A black beginning this for the New Year," thought poor Rachel, whose luck had set her in the midst of this dismal episode. "Oh! how thankful shall I be when my visit is over, and I return to the peace and kindly comforts of home!"

The same afternoon about four o'clock, while Katherine and she were prosing over the family event by the library fire, Grace came running in to say that Lady Foulis had sent for them, and they must go immediately. The sisters disappeared and Rachel was left alone—not for many minutes, however; for Katherine came back almost at once to tell her that she was wanted too. Lady Foulis would like to see the guest Sir William did not distrust, was the explanation of

this unexpected summons, and she obeyed it with awakened curiosity.

The apartments occupied by Lady Foulis lay all together in the north-eastern wing of the Tower. They were approached by a separate staircase, and the door by which they formerly communicated with the great corridor had been walled up. Katherine bade Rachel take heed to her steps as they began to mount the spiral stair; for it was steep and gloomy, and when they reached the top both were glad to pause and take breath. Opposite to them was a door standing ajar, through which shone the light of a lamp, and when they had waited a moment the staid-visaged woman whom Rachel had seen once before looked out and bade them enter.

It would not be easy to say what Rachel expected to behold, but assuredly it was not what she saw. Visions of sorceresses gray and terrible, of witches wild and weird, of remorse-stricken penitents worn and wasted in living death, had flitted momentarily before her imagination as she climbed the turret-steps; but when the servant opened an inner door, a rush of warm, incense-perfumed air passed over her, and she was ushered into a pretty octagon-shaped room, half darkened by the crimson drapery of five narrow high windows, and half lighted by the ruddy gleam of fir-logs ablaze on the hearth. Her first impression was as of a solemn, glowing picture.

"This is our friend, Rachel Withers," said Grace, coming forward, and taking her hand to lead her to Lady Foulis, who sat erect in a high-backed chair at one corner of the fireside. Each gave the other a direct glance full of inquiry, and then in obedience to a sign from Katherine Rachel sat down by her on a bench of oak which Grace had previously drawn toward the hearth for her own accommodation.

What Lady Foulis saw in Rachel Withers matters little here; what Rachel saw in her was a woman tall, straight, and stately; a woman verging on seventy or past it, with silver-white hair crisped up in some bygone fashion; and covered with a kerchief of black lace tied loosely over it. All her dress was of fine black cloth, flowing and graceful; her hands were long, lean and fair, and her face was like many another face in the gallery of portraits, only more aged perhaps than any of those Warleigh beauties were when they committed their charms to the verdict of posterity—that is to say, her face was like theirs in feature; the curve of the lips, though fallen, was as full; the eyes, though marred by time, were as large and as beautifully cut; but in the expression of her countenance there was something very peculiar and not pleasing. Rachel had heard tell of the second-sight—she could have fancied that Lady Foulis had that weird gift.

There was nothing supernatural in her surroundings now, however—nothing but what contributed to the general air of comfort and convenience. Behind her chair was a curtain drawn back from a tiny oratory in a recess of the wall, graced and decked in the common way. The organ, by means of which she disturbed Rachel's nightly rest, occupied a corresponding position behind the bench on which she was seated with Katherine and Grace. A thick crimson carpet covered the middle of the stone

floor, and in the center of it was a table garnished with books and works like that of any other gentlewoman. What the books were, Rachel did not see; Katherine suggested afterward books of necromancy, and Grace books of devotion; perhaps they were both or neither, or only books of general reading—they looked like it—and Lady Foulis had occasional parcels from the outside world which perhaps contained them. She had letters too, notwithstanding that she was a witch; in fact, to keep up the ghostly shimmer of a mystery we must not inspect it too closely. Before Rachel Withers had been in her presence five minutes she began to think her a person quite capable of being explained; the agreeable feeling was not permanent, but during its continuance it enabled her to collect her faculties, and steady her nerves for what might be to come.

"I revolved just long enough on the wheel of fashion to have all the sentiment ground out of me," were the first distinct words she heard Lady Foulis utter. She was speaking to Grace when Katherine and she entered, and at that sentence interrupted herself to receive them. Rachel hoped that when they were settled she would resume what sounded like a reminiscence of her early life; but she did not; she began on quite another subject, on that which was occupying the minds of the whole household—on Laurence's marriage.

"Laurence Warleigh has taken to himself a wife, and Whinstandale has lighted no bonfires and rung no bells," said she. "It used not to be so in the old time. We have a legend amongst us that says, 'Bride unwelcomed, babe unblessed.' And Oliver is to come home and be king, is he, velvet-gloved Oliver with the claws?" Katherine replied that she had written to him that day by her father's orders. "And his ugly wife and their boy—father and son, they will both stand in better folks' shoon than their own," added Lady Foulis, sneering with a tremulous, withered lip.

"How do you know that Oliver's wife is ugly?" asked Grace. "We have none of us seen her."

"Did he not marry her for money?" was the answer. "But Laurence's bride is a beauty—he always had an eye for a sweet fair face, and he married her for love."

"He was sure never to marry for any thing lower or less," murmured Katherine.

While this conversation was passing, though Rachel did not look at Lady Foulis, and felt indeed strangely restrained from doing so, she was conscious of the dark eyes intently watching her, and was at length startled by her saying with a quaint abruptness, "*You* are making the best of the time present, *you* are content and happy now?" to which she answered "Yes," promptly enough, though the red flew into her face and her pulse redoubled its speed. "That is wise—the future is always unsure," rejoined Lady Foulis, and then addressing Katherine and Grace she said: "*You*, poor things, are having your worst days here—your bright ones will happen elsewhere!"

"We have need to long for them," sighed Katherine. "If they don't make haste we shall be past enjoying them."

"Have patience yet; they may not be so far off as they seem."

All these words of Lady Foulis might be regarded either as gravely prophetic or as simple commonplaces, whichever her hearers liked; but it was good-by to Rachel Withers' composure; she fell somber and silent, and was physically chilled as if a cold shadow enveloped her. Her two friends talked on; told Lady Foulis whom they had seen in Hurtleale, and what delightful hours they had spent at the rectory; and she listened, and put in little phrases in quite a matter-of-fact way. All the time this was transacting, Rachel felt or fancied in some inexplicable manner that the weird woman's thoughts were bent upon herself; very foolish she knew it was, but she could not help it; all her nerves were strung up and in a state of high excitement: the imagination plays our judgment strange tricks.

Lady Foulis did not detain her visitors very long, and when she intimated their dismissal, she rose and touched Rachel on the cheek, saying that it was a lifetime ago since she had seen any thing so round or so rosy; Rachel's skin crisped and shivered at her as one shivers at a wicked story, and she was thankful to get away again, even to the dreary library; but it was ever so long before the ice of that caress was melted out of her warm veins.

Katherine could not forbear smiling. "You will go away and confirm Lady Foulis's reputation as a witch," said she.

Rachel shuddered impressibly and replied that, speaking in dales' parlance, she certainly was not *canny*.

"No," agreed Grace. "She has a remarkable influence. Wherever she draws it from or whatever purpose she puts it to, she has an influence beyond the ordinary power of women. I believe in witchcraft—the Bible admits it, you know."

"I should like to be sure whether she has really any foreknowledge of events, or whether she merely casts out her oracular speeches by way of cheering us," Katherine murmured, reflectively.

"She has always promised us some good ultimately," said Grace; "and whether her promises come true or not I am glad to dream over them while we have so little that is pleasant present with us."

Rachel said she had no faith in prognostics, and Katherine said neither had she—she wished she had—and then they entered on a discussion thereof, tending to the conclusion that they were all weaker than they were willing to admit. They agreed that warnings of a spiritual nature were perfectly ridiculous and impossible; but something within them deeper than reason silently protested against their loudest assertions. Their brains denied, but their nerves confessed to the influence of mysteries beyond the reach of their philosophy to explain.

"I don't believe in ghosts, yet I am mortally afraid of them," shuddered Rachel, with a sensation as of cold water running down her back. "Lady Foulis's kiss was like a frost-blight—and what did she mean about the future being unsure?" Katherine advised her not to worry herself with speculating on any dark sayings, and fortunately she was not of the temper that inclines to do it.

"As soon as I see the smoke of our blessed

Hurtleale chimneys, I shall be as blithe as a bee once more," said she, rallying her courage; "but here I could positively learn to mope and be miserable if I slept, or did not sleep rather, within sound of that solemn organ—listen to the dirge, it is moaning and sobbing through now. O Katie! O Grace! I hope it won't be long before some true knight comes riding this way to carry you off from your haunted castle!"

Her friends laughed and asked why her wits ran so much on weddings—was it Laurence's had set them a-gee? She said no, and somehow it came to pass during the next hour, that the ghost-talk retired outside the screen, and within it Rachel told them her little love story. True was the sympathy and tender—but *how*, *why* had she kept the beautiful secret from them so long? She had been with them four whole days!

III.

Swiftly obedient to his father's summons, on the third of January Oliver Warleigh arrived at the Tower; and terms for his permanent establishment there were soon made between them. Katherine was very angry. She felt that Laurence would not be forgiven now, and that they should be more widely separated than ever. It would be Oliver's interest to keep him away from Whinstane, and what was Oliver's interest nobody expected him to neglect. Be that as it might, however, by the arrangements Sir William agreed to with his younger son, his daughters' lives could hardly fail to be changed for the better. With a sister-in-law living at the Tower they must acquire a certain measure of liberty and society. Oliver stipulated for the occupancy of the whole of the west wing, for his separate table, servants, horses, and carriage, all at Sir William's expense, and his demands were granted without demur.

Laurence would thus be kept out of his rightful place, and it might be for a long, long term of years—no one could foresee the end of it. Grace thought that Oliver would never lend himself to hinder a reconciliation when the freshness of the offense wore off his father's mind; but Katherine declared she would not trust him unless it could be managed with advantage to himself. Rachel Withers, being placed in the midst of these changes, heard, if she did not share in, the sisters' debates. Oliver, after the momentary surprise of finding any lady at Whinstane as a guest, was very gracious to her; but he impressed her no more favorably now than formerly. It was singular how he could be so polished and even fine-looking a man, and yet have such a strange likeness to Sir William. He asked her twenty questions about John and about their return to Hurtleale, and was pleased to say that as she had made the good beginning of coming to the Tower as a visitor, so he hoped to see her there again and that frequently. Rachel's answer was courteous, but there were mental reservations behind it—of her own free will she would never see the dreadful place again!

Her fortnight was now drawing to an end, and glad would she be to go home—there was no place like it that she had found yet! Mr. Gilsland was there—that is, he was in Hurtleale. She had thought about him incessantly since she

came to Whinstane, and the conclusion of her thinkings was that she really loved him, let his faults in other people's eyes be what they might. Mrs. Sara Grandage had written to her again in her serious sarcastic vein, but it did not alter her sentiments a bit; of course, she felt with regret that nobody agreed with her in them, but she consoled herself with the reflection that hers was probably not a singular case.

On her last night at the Tower, to the general surprise, Lady Foulis sent for her again, and sent for her alone. Katherine averred that she was not mad and never had been, but on this occasion Rachel certainly was relieved to find that the sober attendant remained in the room as long as she staid. Her talk was very wild and incoherent, and while Rachel sat nervously regarding her a strange idea shot into her mind—Lady Foulis had a look of Sir William and she had a look of Oliver; a rare expression came into her face which at odd moments struck out into a likeness and vanished; some trick of feature—of lip or eye it must have been; for when she sought it, it was not there, and no sooner had she said to herself "Again!" than it was gone. She told Rachel in a dreamy, involved sentence which it was not easy to understand, that she was to be mixed up in some mysterious fashion with the fortunes and misfortunes of the Warleighs of Whinstandale. At present her destiny seemed to run clear of theirs, and likely to run clear forever and a day, but she hoped the weird woman's prediction meant good-luck to John in his wooing of Katherine. But the Sibyl, if Sibyl she were, was not in her inspired mood that night, she neither fired nor froze her listener, who went away from her presence simply wondering how and why it had made her so uncomfortable before.

"All my own exalted imagination, I suppose, wrought up to expect witcheries and beguilements," soliloquized she. "A little more preparation, and I might perhaps see ghosts, then hear them speak, and believe them to be actual visitants from another world! It is just as well that I am going away before my fancy has time to get a wry twist. I would not for any thing become a mystical, visionary, phantomizing body such as this old house might make of a stronger mind than mine after a course of its dullness, dreariness, and monotony. I have not had one real good night's rest since I came; but to-morrow, to-morrow, to-morrow I go home, and that comforting thought will rock me asleep, in spite of Lady Foulis and her weariful organ!"

CHAPTER THE THIRD.

THE OLD HURTLEMERE HOUSE.

ALL houses wherein men have lived and died
Are haunted houses. LONGFELLOW.

THE old Hurtlemere House was not a gay bower for a bride in the frozen days of mid-winter, but Laurence Warleigh would have now no other choice of a home. Rachel Withers walked up there the day after her return home, as Grace had entreated her, to see what manner of preparation Mistress Dobie had made for the coming of her young master and his bride. She had done her best, but Rachel thought the house

looked more solitary, gray, and weather-beaten, more haunted, cold, and ghostly than ever house looked before. The topmost slope of the fell rose abruptly behind it, clad from base to brow with dusky fir-woods; in front lay the tarn, fed by a thousand trickling rills from the moors, while round and about swept the purple lines of the mountains, like stern barriers to fence out the world. In the season of flowers and sunshine it had some of the sweetest charms of solitude, but any place more wild or desolate in the dead time of the year it would have been difficult to find, even in these lonely dales of the bleak north-west. The lake was crisped over with ice, and a long, lamentable blast went moaning and wailing through the trees like the very voice of despairing anguish. Every sight, every sound gave her a presentiment of sorrow. Let those laugh at presentiments who could, but she never dared!

And on the ensuing day happened such a mischance! They were really grieved, John Withers and his sister, though it was not a very momentous thing to be grieved about, perhaps. They had arranged that Hurtledale church bells, at least, should ring Laurence Warleigh and his bride a peal of welcome at their coming home, but they did not arrive in the afternoon when they were looked for, and as it grew dark, Kester Greaves, tired of waiting in the cold, went away to his comfortable fireside, and forgot all about them. The next morning they heard at the rectory that the young couple had arrived last night.

Of course, plentiful details were circulating about the event already; one wonders how such details fly abroad; but Mistress Dobie dearly loved a gossip, and had sympathetic cronies enough to help her talk. Mrs. Sarah Grandage was mightily interested to hear the earliest report of the bride; and from one source or another she gleaned the fullest and most circumstantial particulars of every thing that had happened at the Hurtlemere House; and when she had got them well in hand she drove over to luncheon at the rectory for the special purpose of telling Rachel all "how and about it," as she said; and Rachel was quite as glad to listen as Bittersweet to narrate.

It was nightfall when the young people reached their destination, having had twice to vary their route to avoid the heavy snow-drifts that blocked up the hollows of the hills. They brought with them a south-country girl as maid, who cried for the last six miles at the sight of the dreary moors, for which she had exchanged the sunny slopes of Surrey. The bride's spirits, on the contrary, rose buoyantly with every difficulty and discomfort, and when the ramshackle post-chaise, in which they had traveled from Brafferton, rolled in at the gates, she laughed and said it had been quite a merry, adventurous coming home!

Mathew Dobie and his wife, spruced up in their Sunday best, received the young squire and his bride at the door; he, with his short grunt meant to be expressive of welcome; she, with smiles, courtesies, and diffusive apologies for the bitter weather, the time of night, and every other unavoidable incident attending their arrival; and then ushered them into the east parlor, where all possible preparations had been

made for their reception. A fire of pine-knots flashed in the wide range, and a round table spread for dinner stood opposite the hearth, with chairs drawn up on either side. Big bushes of holly, twinkling with red, ripe berries, were stuck above the chimney, and the spoils of the chase, which were the appropriate decorations of Moor Murray's house, had been rearranged on the wainscoted walls with a careful eye to their effect.

The bride expressed herself as charmed with the picturesque novelty of all she saw: "It is so quaint and cozy, Laurence, I like the look of it," said she. "It has the air of the best room at a country inn, such as heroes stop at in romances!"

Then Laurence glanced round at the ruddy, wintery scene, and paid Mistress Dobie a compliment on her skill in educating comfort out of such poor means as lay at her disposal, and immediately settled himself in the unwieldy chair opposite to that in which his wife had already ensconced herself to enjoy the genial shine of the fire. She loosed her traveling cloak and hood as she sat there, and put them off; and when all her golden hair fell down upon her neck, and caught the glinting rays about her cheeks, that blushed like roses from the frosty air, worthy Mistress Dobie, used to hard and homely outlines, pronounced her, with enthusiasm, a real beauty, "fair as a flower and weat as spice!"

Thus far, all had gone delightfully. Laurence laughed, and the bonnie bride turned to her with some merry words of thanks, but, as she spoke, there came over the silly old woman's face a look of woeful dismay, and abruptly exclaiming that she must see about that slow lass, Magsie, or dinner would be spoilt, she hurried from the room and returned to the kitchen with all the wholesome color bleached out of her broad cheeks. Her husband was there, and blameless scapegoat Magsie, roasting herself as well as the game, and Lucy, the poor maid, who had sunk down on the settle in the chimney-nook, and sat wearing a countenance of ineffable discontent and disgust.

Mistress Dobie entered the kitchen wringing her hands and betraying other signs of extreme distress, and when Mathew demanded what ailed the woman—was she gone daft all at once? she answered him in a gust of sobs, "I've gotten a shock, Mathew, I've gotten a shock! Why has Master Laurence brought that pretty cetur to this lonesome wilderness, so far fra her ain country an her ain kin? Is it likelings she'll prosper here—a wee bit delicate bud up ov' our bleak moors? If he don't carry her awa', an' that soon, worse'll come of it."

Mathew looked provoked, and took his pipe out of his mouth, to bid her hold her foolish tongue, and then replaced it, and puffed away with serene philosophy; but Lucy, whose eyes still brimmed with tears, began to whimper, and say it did seem a terrible lonesome spot to live in—nothing but snow, water, and woods shut up amongst mountains.

"It is a dowly, dowly spot, that it is," agreed Mistress Dobie, with a glance that sparkled defiance of Mathew, and a tongue that would not be staid. "We can't see t' reek fra' a neebor's chimley t' year in an' t' year out—for nee-

bors there's none; an' only when t' wind sets fair can we hear t' jow o' t' church bells. We might be dwelling in a heathen land. I hardlings know how I've bidden to live here going along o' thirty year, an' me a christian body that allus enjoyed my privileges afore."

"Thou's bidden to live here, Dolly, woman, acause I've lived here, an' acause it's been thy dooty," said her husband, with sententious gravity. "An' now let's ha' no more prate nor clack, but show this lass to her missis's chaumer, for they'll be wanting to rightle thersels afore dinner, pretty folks allus does. Come, bustle, woman, bustle; t' grass'll grow under thy feet, an' this bod'll be ower done, backen an' baste as Magsie will, if there's much langer to wait."

Thus peremptorily admonished, Mistress Dobie led Lucy up the great draughty staircase, and having made her acquainted with the geography of her own and her mistress's rooms she left her there and went down again to the kitchen, still wearing her troubled air of mystery. Having shut the door, and spied round furtively to make sure that there was nobody within hearing but her husband and Magsie, she drew near to Mathew, who was refilling his pipe, and caused him to suspend the operation of lighting it by uplifting a solemn forefinger, and saying, in a voice of compassionate awe:

"She's doomed, Mathew, she's doomed, that bonnie, bonnie thing! Don't thou sneer. She was smiling wi' her innocent lips, an' speaking to me so soft an' sweet, when I see all at once them *white hands* wavering aboon her head, like as if they was blessing her. Thou might ha' knocked me down wi' a feather, I was so fleyed. An' thou knows what it means, Mathew; I see 'em, I tell thee, I see 'em wi' my two eyes as plain as I see Magsie now!"

"Out woman, out! can she see wi' her ten toes? What suld I heed o' ghostises an' white hands? A blessing'll harm her none, come it fra' sperrit or come it fra' flesh. Don't let on wi' no such stuff to yon bit o' a lass upstairs: she's a faint-hearted body fra' t' mak on her, an' wad be for warning her lady, till, among ye, ye'd scare her into t' churchyard. T' folly o' woman-folk is fairly enew to drive a sensy man daft, an' t' alder they grows, t' sillier they gets—that's my experience."

With this shrewd remark, felt to be exhaustive of the subject, Mathew restored his pipe to his mouth and held his peace; while Magsie, who had listened open-mouthed and bewildered, let the bird on the spit burn—a catastrophe that appealed so forcibly to Mistress Dobie's nose and temper that she promptly discharged her from her neglected duty, and superintended the roast herself with a careful querulousness that left her no further leisure for her phantom fears until the dinner was duly served, and Master Laurence and his fair young wife were shut up in the old parlor to make the best of it.

Later in the evening she was summoned to answer a question—Were the outer wooden shutters made fast over the windows? Laurence said his wife shivered, and felt an icy blast blowing upon her head wherever she sat. Yes, the shutters were all made fast, but the house was full of draughts, Mistress Dobie told them, and then added: "It's a bitter black frost, Master Laurence, an' a nor-east wind to-night; an' when

that's t' case, there's gusts i' this room to rive t' very hair off of ane's head. It don't become me to advise, but I suld say this is hardlings the spot for a delicate south-bred lady."

"But a nor-east wind does not happen every night," said the bride; to which Mistress Dobie responded: "It mostlings does. Hurtledeale's a rare place for cold weather. I say sometimes when Winter leaves other folks he comes up here an' stays wi' us, until we're fain indeed to see his back when he does go—and go he doesn't most years, not for good, till into May, an' he allus shows us his blue neb again quite t' fore end o' October."

The young wife only laughed at this and rejoined that they would try to make him warm and welcome; and when Mistress Dobie went back to Mathew in the kitchen she proclaimed that Master Laurence's wife was the lady to draw sunbeams out of cucumbers, and that whether the White Hands meant mischief or not, her life, while it lasted, was sure to be a happy one.

John Withers was not present when Bittersweet detailed her story—detailed it at much greater length than is recorded here, making it sound extremely like the initial chapter of a romance; so that Rachel had the pleasure of repeating it to him, which she did in spite of numerous impatient ejaculations and a final verdict that "Miss Dobie was a superstitious old goose, and ought to have her tongue tied if she had no discretion in the use of it"—a rather strong remark for the rector.

"It is very strange, but people always have believed in the legend of the White Hands that haunt the old Hurtlemere House," said Rachel. "Katherine Warleigh was talking to me about it one afternoon at Whinstane, and she would have been quite annoyed had I expressed a doubt of its truth."

John here actually went the length of saying that he thought Katherine had more sense!

"Old families are as tenacious of their ghost-stories as of their personal honor," persisted Rachel, who wanted to go on talking; but John took down a big book from its shelf, buried his studious pate in it, and turned a deaf ear to her little subsequent remarks, thus intimating to her that the present was a time to be silent.

Rachel felt rather cross—John really sometimes treated her quite like a child; and to restore herself to a sense of ease and dignity, she went immediately to her desk and wrote Mr. Gilsland a letter—he never wearied of her chat, either in person or on paper. They were new lovers, and oh! how delightful it was!

II.

Rachel Withers did not hear from Whinstane, though she wrote twice before the month was out, and both John and she then began to think that all correspondence with Hurtledeale would be interdicted; Sir William Warleigh might suspect his daughters of opening a secret channel of communication with their offending brother through her if they were allowed to exchange letters.

During the interim they had seen the bride twice, and were agreed that Laurence Warleigh had as fair an excuse for an imprudent marriage as ever man possessed. Her name was Helena—Neil, he called her. She was a bright beauty,

very happy and sprightly looking, with dark-blue eyes, abundant golden-brown hair, delicate features, and the sweetest little mouth in the world—such a contrast to Laurence, who was a big, massive fellow, burnt almost to an umber shade. His complexion *colored* well, he observed to John Withers, who was struck by his Indian tint; and then he told him that it was thus enriched during a couple of years to and fro the wild savannahs of America. He had been a great traveler during his absence from the dales, and was as pleasant and frank a companion as any one could desire; he always had a fine temper, and his wandering life and various hardships had not spoiled but mellowed it.

John Withers and Laurence Warleigh were glad to meet again; for as friends and companions, they had formerly suited each other to the core; Helena and Rachel also were sociably inclined, and while the young men talked together of hair-breadth escapes and adventures in worlds remote, they made acquaintance over the world at home. They soon arrived at the degree of intimacy implied by the use of Christian names; for Laurence introduced Rachel to his wife as an old playmate of his sisters', and they took to each other straightway.

All her life hitherto, Helena had spent in sunshiny, flowery cottages, lightsofely fitted and furnished; but the dusky glow of her ancient rooms at the Hurtlemere House pleased her romantically. She had a vivid fancy and an active imagination, both healthily toned and cheerful.

On the first day of February, she was out of the garden for the first time since they arrived. The wind had dropped a little, and a pale sunshine gleamed faintly along the ridges of the moors. Laurence still thought the cold almost too severe, but she quite craved for a walk, and he let her go. For some time they kept along the hard frozen lane between high sheltering banks and walls; and then, at her special wish, they essayed to climb the fell up a path that was trodden daily, by Mathew Dobie, in going to and fro the sheepfold. Nothing but young blood and young spirits could have kept them from freezing when they reached the brow; for the wind was keen and steely as a razor. Thence Helena had a view of the dale-world beyond her bower of Hurtlemere. Laurence pointed out by name three or four scattered villages in Mirkdale, as many lonely farmsteads, and two church-towers. Then, bidding her carry her eye along a certain line of moor to the far north, he said she might see Penslaven and Whinstane Tower, almost parallel with each other on the horizon; but either her vision fell short, or the winter atmosphere was too hazy, for neither castle nor tower could she discern—only sinuous waves of mountains beyond mountains, and cloud upon cloud, until mist and vapor, wood and hill were all fused and melted together in one gray-purplish shade. Two grand old feudal fortresses scowled at each other across the wide valley upon which they looked immediately down, and a rapid, shallow river still ran its swift course between the plains of snow in spite of the long frost. They almost raced down to the mere again, arriving at home out of breath and in a glow of exuberant spirits. Lucy ceased re-pining at the sight of them, and Mistress Dobie

exclaimed in the warmth of her heart: "Bless 'em! it did her good to look at 'em! If they weren't as blithe and happy as a pair of May birds!"

That was in the morning—in the afternoon snow fell again, and Helena worked while Laurence read to her. When blind man's holiday came in the twilight, instead of ordering candles, they told stories over the fire—ghost-stories—and Laurence, with his secluded northern breeding, had, like his sisters, many a flesh-creeping tale to tell. These eldritch legends were rather greswome diet for Helena's nerves; for though they fascinated her, she confessed to Rachel Withers half-laughing afterward that she was afraid to go up-stairs without somebody at her elbow when she had been listening to them.

The east parlor, which they chiefly occupied, had the best look-out from the house, but it was a very cold room. Helena frequently complained there of the icy draught blowing down on her head, and professed that if it continued she must take to wearing a little black skull-cap, like Father Hurst, who used to come to her grand-mamma's; but Laurence laid a hand atop of her golden curls and vowed he would never see them hidden.

One afternoon, when John Withers and his sister had gone up to the Hurltemere House, Rachel and Helena were left to themselves a short time, while Laurence carried John off into the hall to inspect some newly arrived trophies of his wild travels and hunting expeditions. In their absence, Mistress Dobie presented herself in quest of certain household commands, and observing that Helena had thrown a handkerchief over her head, she inquired, with an air of heartfelt earnestness, if she were suffering from a chill again. Helena admitted that she was, on which the anxious worthy soul said in a voice of solemn entreaty: "Oh! if Master Laurence would only take heed in time and carry you awa' fra Hurltemere it would be well for ye both. It arn't going to agree wi' you, an' how is it likeliest it suld? There's naught I like less to hear young folks complain on than creeps an' shivers o' the skin." Helena only laughed, and said Mistress Dobie was an inhospitable person who wanted to be rid of the trouble of them.

"Nay, none so," protested she; "the more in a house the merrier, I allus say!"

"But I like Hurltemere. I shall never cease to like it. Laurence brought me home to it, and home it will be as long as he chooses."

"I've discharged my conscience!" rejoined Mistress Dobie, spreading forth her hands as if putting aside a responsibility. "I've discharged my conscience, and Miss Rachel there has heard me. Wilfu'ness has aye doom in it."

"You can tell ghost-stories, Mistress Dobie; I know you can!" cried Helena. "I hear it in your voice and see in your eyes!"

"Never speak lightly o' spiritual things," said the dame, slowly shaking the head of rebuke. "Ane misbeliever, like my Matt, is enow in a house. Once a ghost appear til' him an' he'll doubt nae mair, none he! An' there's that poor washed-out bit of a Lucy—she's for saying *she* don't believe i' no such logic nayther."

"She has been taught that there is nothing

worse in the world than ourselves—grand-mamma always told us so when we were afraid of going to bed in the twilight," replied Helena, while dimples of fun played rosilily about her lips.

"Oh! but there is tho'!" exclaimed Mistress Dobie in prompt and indignant denial of such a monstrous assertion. "Letting alane t' gret enemy o' us all—an' I suppose nobody 'ull dare be so wicked as to go an' set it abroad as *he's* dead—there's folks upo' folks a lang sight worse nor us. Does any body want to even my good man wi' Black Bill o' Moorhus, who'll come to be hanged if he only live till t' tow's twined; or *me* to that auld witch, Peggy Tristy, who thrives by cursing her neebors uphill an' down dale o' the Red Riggs? Sure o' it, there's a precious crew o' sinners a bonny sight worse nor us. I'll stan' to that whiles I can stan' at a'." And having worked round to earthly virtues and people, Mistress Dobie resumed her natural voice, dropt her plaintive brows, and became for a few moments a mere quick-tempered woman of this world instead of a lugubrious interpreter of the oracles of the other. But the fascination of ghost-talk was upon her too strongly for her yet to refrain her tongue from it; for, after a pause to recover breath, she began, to Rachel's exceeding dismay, to narrate that old legend which attached to the Hurltemere House.

"When any body iv' this house is marked for death within the twelvemonth," said she, solemnly; "*any body* mind, there's two White Hands appears aboon their heads, blessing 'em continually. It was a lady iv' the gret civil war times, they tell, as was blessing three sons afore they went out to fight, when it was borne in upon her heart that she suld never see ane o' 'em more—an' *she never did*; for they was all slain i' the battle. *I've seen them hands myself*—I've seen 'em oft enew. I saw 'em ower Master Laurence's mother the year she was taken; an' I saw 'em ower my own son—him as stout an' hale a young man as ere a ane i' all t' dale. Yet it came to pass ane December night when the waters was out, and him coming home fra' Brafferton market, he missed the causeway an' fell into the river. We sought him high, an' we sought him low, an' some said he'd 'listed an' gone for a soldier; his father, he hoped, but I hoped never. Says I, 'I saw the White Hands ower his head only the night afore he were lost, an' alive to Hurltemere ne'er will he come back.' An' when t' flood went down they found him where th' water had not been more nor two feet deep. It was his doom; I said nought. He lies i' the churchyard upo' t' hill, where Mathew's kin lie—right-hand side as you go in at t' yett. There's no stone—nought. But I knows where my boy lies."

Helena looked very grave during this recital of a well-known tragedy, which Rachel Withers remembered as having happened when she was a child; but immediately it was ended she said, "Dear Mistress Dobie, don't tell Lucy this story; it would terrify her out of her senses. She has been grieving to me already about the haunted loneliness of this place, and I can not bear to think of losing her."

"She's but a wan-spirited body, and I wouldn't scare her for all i' the world," gasped Mistress

Dobie with a confusion which betrayed how her tongue had outrun her discretion with Lucy and the legend already.

Helena detected the fact, but she did not drive the old gossip to an avowal, and when she was left with Rachel alone, her only remark was, that she thought such traditions as that of the White Hands were the most fabulous nonsense in the world. Of course, Rachel agreed with her; for whatever she might feel or fancy in the mysterious atmosphere of Whinstane, in the sunshine of Hurdledale she did not believe in ghosts one bit.

They had some further talk on everyday matters until Laurence and John rejoined them after their inspection of the wonderful bones and skins, spoils of American plains and forests. The rector and his sister then ended their visit and went away, not a single allusion to Whinstane Tower having been spoken by any of the party. Neither had it been mentioned on the previous occasions of their meeting.

III.

No carriage and but one rough cob entered into the modest establishment of Laurence Warleigh and his wife. The weather continued terrible, and when she could not walk she staid indoors altogether. She sewed and Laurence read, but the winter days were long, and their stock of books was soon exhausted. One day early in March Laurence walked down to the rectory to borrow something amusing, and carried off *Mansfield Park*.

For the first time since his arrival with his wife at the Hurdlemere House, John Withers thought he looked out of spirits, and a very little encouragement brought him, at last, to speak of his father; he said that he had taken no notice of his marriage in any way—that all the family indeed had treated the announcement with silent contempt.

"It took them by surprise, but surely they have had leisure to consider of it by this time," said he. "I am grieved for Nell that they have not given her a welcome, and she feels it too. I would go over, but I should not like to have the dogs set on me, which Sir William would do without scruple if he were in a savage mood. I have written to ask Mrs. Damer Warleigh to come and cheer Nell out of her disappointment as soon as the frost breaks up. The girls might have written; at any rate, *they* have no quarrel with me; and if Oliver be at Whinstane as I am told he is, I can not imagine why I hear nothing from him."

It was evident to John Withers that Laurence had no idea of the virulence of Sir William's rage against him, and also that he had no distrust of his brother Oliver. His was one of those noble tempers that never suspects. And who could warn him against his own flesh and blood?

It was about ten days subsequent to this, that Rachel Withers, after a week's confinement to the swept walks in the garden and shrubbery, one morning summoned courage to go up to the Hurdlemere House by the cart-road. A hard walk it was, and when she arrived there she would have given any thing to escape; but Mistress Dobie, unwitting of aught amiss, received her gladly, and ushered her into the east room;

and when she entered, there, behold, was Helena weeping, and Laurence at his wits' end to comfort her! Rachel's first impulse was to retreat, but Laurence called out to her not to run away; and while she stood hesitating and feeling wretchedly awkward, Helena came forward and declared sobbing that it was all about nothing—all about nothing, when these were the first tears since their marriage!

Like a pair of babies, they confessed themselves to Rachel, and in confessing were perhaps a little comforted. It seemed that Laurence had been writing a second letter to Mrs. Damer Warleigh, and that when it was finished, he tried to tempt Helena out for a walk; but she, cowering over the fire, looked up at him with pitiful eyes, and said: "No; the wind was so loud, the frost so cold." He urged that she had walked in worse weather; for though the sky looked lowering, it was fair overhead and crisp underfoot, while the sun had made several attempts to escape from its curtain of clouds. It would do her good, he said; she was only suffering from a little lazy fit.

Instead of answering him, she began to cry, and when he besought her to tell him what ailed her, she could only hide her pretty pathetic face on his shoulder, and say she did not know. He could not understand it in the least. She went on weeping lamentably; not with moans or hysterical shrieks, but as if a gradual flood of tears had been long swelling in her heart, and was now overflowing in spite of her. At this crisis Rachel had the misfortune to intrude upon them. Laurence had little experience of women, or he would have known what an easement it is sometimes to be let alone to weep for no ostensible cause; so he began to fret and fume, and to fancy that Helena was dissatisfied and unhappy, and then he vowed he would carry her away from Hurdledale forthwith.

At that she opened her lips, and said it was over—her crying fit, she meant—and he must not mind. But he would mind. He railed against his father, against Oliver, against his sisters, for what he called their cruel neglect, and grew so bitter of speech at last, that Helena was fain in her turn to assume the task of consoler; and brightening up, professed herself ashamed of her childish outbreak, and wondered hardly less than Laurence himself what had made her give way to such foolishness. Finally, peace was restored.

Sober-minded Rachel Withers went home deeply grieved and anxious after what she had witnessed; she believed she understood it, but she did not *quite*. Helena was no doubt feeling the pain of her unacknowledged position; for she had that tenderness and cheerful kindness of heart that suffer most from unfriendly neglect. She knew when she married Laurence that there was estrangement betwixt him and his father, but she trusted to see it healed, and counted with perfect confidence on his sisters for her frequent companions. She was barely seventeen years old, and until she saw Hurdledale, she never saw lack of family affection. Rachel Withers was good and thoughtful, but she could not make of her the friend she looked to find ready-made in Katherine and Grace; and as week after week went on, and Whinstane was silent, and they made no sign, her disap-

pointment grew certainly very heavy. But neither was it this that caused that overflow of tears which Rachel saw; what it was Helena kept in her heart a secret—a secret even from Laurence.

IV.

The sixth of April was a foregleam of spring. When Rachel Withers rose that morning there was no frost on the windows; a rapid thaw had set in, and the fell was marked in long furrows of black and white; the latter becoming narrower and narrower as the sun gained in power, until only here and there soiled patches lay on the north side of a bush, a boulder, or a hollow in the slopes. The sky was brilliant and cloudless, the wind hushed, and only the sound of the hill streams, flooded by the melting snows, and running riot in their pebbly channels, broke the delicious calm of the morning.

John Withers was pledged to a long round of pastoral visits, and after Rachel's duties at home and in the school were accomplished, she began to think she could not do better than redeem a promise she had made to Helena of spending with her the first free morning she found at her disposal; she therefore set off and reached the Hurtlemere House just as Helena was on the point of starting with Lucy for a ramble in the woods to see what they could discover in the way of mosses and wild-flowers. She received her very gladly, and explained that Laurence had gone over to Brafferton, which made her coming the more opportune.

"I have just been telling Lucy that the violets will be out at Everham now," Helena said. "When grandmamma opens the breakfast-room window of a morning before prayers, there rushes in such a sweet perfume!"

"And the primroses in Beechwood!" exclaimed Lucy, brightening at the recollection. "Oh! what gatherings we did use to have!"

"We have wealth of wild-flowers too," Rachel told them. "Here comes Mathew Dobie—ask him if we have not."

In answer to their questions the gruff old farmer said:

"Yes, there was snowdrops, primroses, 'niminies, daffydownhillies, blue-bells, king-cups, cowslips, an' all sorts i' their seasons—t' woods was like as if they were carpeted wi' 'em. An' up o' t' muirs there was t' gorse, yaller as gould, an' never no more out o' blossom than kissing was out o' fashion; an' i' August wasn't there t' heather, like a royal king's robe o' purple—flowers! ay, there was flowers i' plenty for them as wanted 'em."

So they went up into the wood, splashing through the marshy grass, Helena and Lucy laughing and gay as a couple of holiday children. They rambled far and wide under the trees, and staid out gathering beautiful mosses and other treasures for more than two hours; and when they returned indoors Helena and Rachel made themselves busy in decking the east parlor with their spoils of greenery. Helena was much more skillful at the tasteful task than her companion; it was astonishing what pretty, ingenious pyramids she constructed with a few roots of primroses, ready to burst into bloom, mingled with snowdrops, all the mould being hidden in rich, long-fronded moss.

They had concluded their work, Lucy had cleared away the relics, and they were just about to dispose themselves for a comfortable cose by the fireside, when there appeared, advancing up the avenue, a lady on horseback, wrapt in a heavy cloak, with the hood drawn over her head, and attended by an elderly man-servant. Rachel's first thought was of Katherine, but a second glance assured her that it was Mrs. Damer Warleigh, of Bristowe. Mistress Dobie was already bustling out to receive her, and Helena watched her dismount with mingled pleasure and trepidation.

"What a disappointment that Laurence is away!" whispered she; and then they heard the visitor's clear voice in the hall, saying: "So your master is not at home? I am sorry for that, but it is his wife I came to see chiefly. Tell her I am here."

"An' fain she'll be, Mrs. Damer," was the distinct response. "You're the first o' Master Laurence's kin that has thought it worth while to come near her, poor young thing that she is!"

Then the door opened, and Helena met, with a beating heart, first the gaze and then the warm embrace of the dignified old lady, who kissed her several times on both blushing cheeks before she let her go, perhaps because she knew there were tears in the sweet veiled eyes.

"So, my dear, so," said she, soothingly, lifting up her chin, and looking in the pretty face very kindly, "you and I are going to be friends." And then Helena, forcibly swallowing down the sob that had risen in her throat, smiled forth a real welcome. "Laurence is gone to Brafferton, I hear," Mrs. Damer went on, "and, as he is not with us, the next best thing is to sit down and talk about him." And, suiting the action to the word, she let Helena and Rachel take off her cloak, and being ensconced in an easy-chair by the fire, she began—

"I hope you know that nothing but the weather has kept me away so long," she said. "Laurence is almost my own boy, and I have been anxious to see his wife ever since he brought her up this wild Hurtledeale, but the frost has been enough to pinch an old woman to death. However, when his letter reached me this morning, I said to the squire, 'Nothing shall hinder me from going to see that pair of babes in the wood to-day. Thomas shall saddle me the mare, and I will ride over directly after breakfast; there is a moon, so expect me back by bed-time, and not before.' And now, as Laurence is at Brafferton, I can stay peaceably to see him, and hear his plans. I trust he does not intend to bury himself and you alive here much longer, for I must protest strenuously against that folly."

"We are very happy; we like Hurtledeale," replied Helena, who was now wearing her sunniest face. "I do not care for the world."

"The world, the world, my innocent child, what do you mean by *the world*? Solitude is not good for young folks—you will mope and grow weary. Living here always would be to you like planting a rose-bush under the cold shadow of a north wall, and bidding it bloom. It would never bloom, my dear, it would pine away and die. Then, Laurence is a young man, and must have society after his kind or he will be spoilt. You are enough for each other to-

day and to-morrow, and the day after to-morrow in one sense, but there is virtue in variety, and in dullness lie the seeds of many discontents. Trust me, child, dullness will find its way to Hurltemere if you persist in making it your permanent retreat."

"I am ready to do whatever Laurence wishes," replied Helena, cheerfully. "We have amused ourselves very well so far, and spring is coming. If I had his sisters for my companionous sometimes, I should have nothing left to desire."

Mrs. Damer Warleigh made no direct answer to this remark, but encouraged Helena to speak about her childhood, her grandmamma Gwynne, and her bringing up at Everham, every word she uttered reflecting her good feeling, good sense, and sweetness of disposition. "Twas a thousand pities she was a Roman Catholic!" the kind old lady said to Rachel when they were for a moment alone; but that could not be imputed to her as a fault, and she adopted the fair young wife straightway into her warm affections. They all lunched together, and the afternoon sped swiftly on, four o'clock arriving and bringing Laurence with it almost before Helena had had time to feel his absence long. His eager greeting testified how welcome was this visit from Mrs. Damer Warleigh, and after personal inquiries and congratulations were over, he immediately began to ask about the state of things and feelings at Whinstane; but in consideration of his innocent wife's presence, she gave the briefest and most reluctant answers.

"Speak out," said he at last; "what is for me is for Helena too; and Rachel Withers knows all about us."

"Your sisters never have been free to do as they would—you must remember that, Laurence," replied Mrs. Damer in a deprecating tone. "And they are as much under harsh authority now as formerly."

Helena colored painfully, and looked up in Laurence's face as he exclaimed hotly, "Then they do not mean to come over?"

"Sir William has forbidden them—and perhaps Oliver is not acting quite as he should. I told him so myself."

"Oliver! Has Oliver turned against me? He wrote fairly enough beforehand—was he not to be trusted?"

"He is not befriending your cause now. He is supreme at Whinstane—he and his Lady Georgiana. Katherine is by no means in love with her; indeed, they are quite antagonistic spirits."

"Katherine has a will of her own, and can exercise it on occasion. And so she is not coming—neither she nor Grace! Never mind, Nell, we can live without them—let them go!"

There was a very grieved look on the young wife's downcast face at this conclusion to her hopes of friends amongst Laurence's family. He continued to speak on as if he made no account of their neglect, but he did make very great account of it indeed. He was deeply wounded and mortified, for Helena's sake perhaps more than for his own; for though they had that love between them which softens every despite of fortune, still it was hard to have brought her so far from home and familiar friends, to find only the chilling shadow of avoidance and neglect amongst his people. The heir's wife and un-

acknowledged—it was a very cruel position for her indeed.

After a considerable pause, Mrs. Damer Warleigh opened the subject of their having taken up their abode at the Hurltemere House. "We shall stay here," Laurence replied. "We must stay here—we are lucky in possessing even such a home as this independent of my father. And Nell likes it—don't you, my darling?"

"Better than any place in the whole wide world," was the fervent response.

"It is nonsense to talk about *must*," said Mrs. Damer again. "We all know that there are a hundred ways and means by which the heir to Penslaven and Whinstane might raise money if he would—not that I advise you to resort to wasteful expedients. I could not make out from Oliver, whether Sir William is allowing you any thing now or not."

"He has not given me sixpence since I left the Tower last—Oliver knows that very well. As for borrowing money, I do not care to contract any obligations that must make me look forward to my father's death for relief. We are not people of luxurious habits, Nell and I, and therefore we may get along here for a time contentedly enough."

"Oh, yes!" murmured Helena, and gazed up at him with a glorified love and confidence shining in her sweet face.

"I shall buy a pony to carry her about the moors, and we shall remain in Hurltemere," continued Laurence, warming into a more cheerful mood. "You and your girls will come over now and then to see us, or if you do not—well! we shall live like Adam and Eve alone in Paradise."

"I do not remember that Eve enjoyed the indulgence of a pony," replied Mrs. Damer pleasantly. "However, you are both young, happy and strong, and a year's seclusion can do you no great harm. If Hurltemere should grow weary you are not under a vow to stay in it, but can avail yourselves of the privilege of changing your independent minds. It is a toil of a pleasure for indifferent folks to get up here, and you are sure to be left pretty much to your own society; but we will see you as often as we can, though I must warn you that we have a grand scheme pending at Bristowe. The squire has all but promised to carry us to Switzerland this summer; if we go, it will be early in next month, and then this visit must stand for both how-d'ye-do and good-by!"

"The gods are against us!" said Laurence half-laughing. "But we shall circumvent them—you will not find us grown over with moss when you come back."

"I hope not," rejoined the old lady; and then they talked on more lightly and pleasantly of Laurence's travels and of the sons and daughters who had been married from Bristowe since he went away, until John Withers came in to take his sister home, according to an arrangement made between them before she set off in the morning.

They walked back to the rectory by the moor and the High-beck, which was coursing down its rocky bed full and noisily, and when they had crossed by the bridge—for the stepping-stones were quite washed over by the swollen stream—Rachel told her brother how there was

no present chance of a reconciliation between Whinstane and the Hurltemere House.

"I am very sorry to hear it," said he, and spoke no more until they reached the rectory. By his face he was thinking about Katherine.

CHAPTER THE FOURTH.

TWO STRINGS TO HIS BOW.

It is good to be off with the old love
Before you are on with the new.—*Old Ballad.*

I.

THE sudden break-up of the frost set all the dale free, and every body began rushing about calling on every body else, and making the most of the welcome sunshine. Amongst the earliest, Mrs. Sara Grandage drove up to the rectory in the chill dignity-mood which she had chosen to adopt toward her goddaughter since her engagement to Mr. Gilsland had been acknowledged—she declared that she could not reconcile herself to it, and that the more she saw of him, the less she liked him. Sheer prejudice, Rachel was convinced. She did not believe Bittersweet was ever cordially glad to hear of young folks marrying, but how was the world to go on unless they did? She would have cared less for her opinions, however, had not John also been so obviously of her mind. He had quite wounded her feelings a little while back by saying with an air of resigned weariness that a man need not see much of his brother-in-law if they did not suit. True enough, rejoined poor Rachel, but she should not like her marriage to detach her from her brother or any of her old friends. Her course of true love, you perceive, was not running quite smooth.

Bittersweet had certainly repented her of that grand threat of altering her will. Said she thereanent: "I respect the liberty of the subject, Dumpling, and would by no means restrain a willful woman from being miserable in her own way; therefore you will get what I intended you to have at my death, but not before. And I am not going to die yet, remember that. My family are all long-lived." Rachel replied that she might live forever for any coveting she felt for her legacy; and then Bittersweet protested: "Ay, but if Mr. Gilsland knew what I have left you he would begrudge me every breath I have to draw!"

Rachel grew most eloquently indignant. "Why should you attribute such wicked selfishness to a person of whom you can know so little?" cried she. "I do not discern in him this vulgar craving for money, though I sometimes wish he indulged less ambitious hopes of worldly advancement. A great position and wide popularity are not essential to my scheme of happiness; I could be quite content never to raise my eyes beyond Hurltemere; but then I am only a woman, and he is a man of spirit and genius!" Bittersweet curled up her nose expressively and said he was nothing of the sort.

Rachel Withers' friends and acquaintance did not fail of their duty toward her in the way of advice and of warning; but they entirely misunderstood her temper if they hoped to detach her from Mr. Gilsland by constant abuse and sarcasm. It was always her propensity to

take the part of unlucky or unpopular people, and her sympathy went invariably with the unsuccessful person whom the rest of the world combined to run down. Every word therefore that was said against her lover only made her the more determined to see with her own eyes and judge with her own heart of the good that was in him.

Amongst others, worthy Mrs. Anderside must needs take her to task. "I have known you ever since you were born, Rachel, and you never thoroughly surprised me before," said she solemnly. "How disappointed your dear mamma would be if she were living now! I always took you for a steady-going, right-headed, practical little body, without a taint of sentimentality about you, and they tell me you have positively fallen in love with our curled Adonis of a curate! I declared that I would not believe it until I had it from your own lips. Now is it true?" Rachel admitted that it was, and the old lady, after indulging herself with a prolonged gaze at her conscious face, exclaimed in a tone of comical vexation: "Won't Kitty be grieved when she hears it!"

"Why should Kitty be grieved?" Rachel rather indiscreetly asked.

"For the same reason that every body else is grieved—because there is no chance of your being happy with him," was the reply. "My dear child, what can you know of his disposition, his temper, his character? You have been too hasty by half in forming an engagement; it is barely six months since you first met. Look at Kitty and excellent Mr. Crofts, how patiently *they* waited."

"They waited twenty years, I believe, but if I am not married earlier than Kitty I will remain a spinster to the end of my days," retorted Rachel. Kitty was, indeed, hardly a judicious example for her mother to cite, and she became sensible of the fact when the deed was done; but she continued her lecture notwithstanding.

"For three-and-twenty years did Mr. Crofts remain in the same humble lodging over Jane Nabb's millinery shop, and never a complaint did he make in all that time of any want or inattention. Mr. Gilsland succeeded him in the same rooms, and before the week was out I had been down twice to accommodate difficulties. At the month's end he changed his quarters, and changed them so much for the worse that he had notice to quit before he had occupied his apartments three days; they say the woman of the house rang all the bells for joy when he was going out of it—very insolent of her if she did, but I can quite believe it. Since then he has moved four or five times, and I hear he is now on the eve of another fitting. Each of the womanfolk who has had to deal with him, proclaims him a selfish, thankless, inconsiderate fidget. 'He'd be cheap at two guineas a week, ma'am, and seven shillings is the money,' said Jane Nabbs; 'I don't know when I've been so rejoiced to see any body's back as I was to see Mr. Gilsland's. Mr. Crofts was worth a hundred of him!'"

Rachel was not prepared to dispute that proposition with Mrs. Nabbs or with Mrs. Anderside either, but she thought and said it was very unkind and very *wrong* to collect and retail to her all the paltry gossip that was circulated

against Mr. Gilsland; but she did not believe one half of it—no, nor one tenth part of it! Warming up into fiery indignation as she proceeded, she said: "He has lived hitherto in comparative luxury, and I see nothing wonderful in his failing to be comfortable even in the best of their poor little Brafferton lodgings—I should be rather astonished if he were! It is easy enough to be self-denying and contented in theory, but the practice of most of us would give way if it were tried every day at dinner-time with chops half scorched and half raw, and potatoes to match them, either as hard as stones or boiled to a mummy. It is very fine for people to talk lightly of other folks' semi-starvation, when they have got a good cook themselves." By which little oration Mistress Rachel betrayed that her lover was not above worrying her with his petty discomforts at home as well as his lack of appreciation abroad; and for a naturally weak young woman it will be allowed that she came out pretty strong in his defense.

II.

If time did not fly in Hurdledale, it kept even pace and was rarely heavy, rarely lagging. With her domestic affairs, the school, and the poor people, Rachel Withers had few leisure hours on her hands that had not more claims than enough to satisfy. Either Mr. Gilsland was at the rectory or she must write to him; and very exacting he proved in that particular—or there was a visit owing, or Mrs. Sara Grandage dropped in for her spell of coteremporary social history, as she was pleased to call her gossip, or something else, unforeseen, happened. She could almost have found in her heart to envy Laurence Warleigh and his wife the quiet leisure of their lives, with nobody going near them, and nothing to attend to but each other.

When spring was fully come, with its fresh beauty of field and forest, on the pony which Laurence, according to his promise, had bought for Helena's service, she rode to Brafferton and back to say her prayers in the Catholic chapel twice or thrice a week; then to and fro the hills, and, as the days lengthened, they made further excursions amongst the dales into other haunts as secluded as their own, where generation after generation had lived and died, seemingly without ever a thought of forsaking their remote homes for any busier world. Years hence, if God spared them, their existence now would be to look back upon like one long, sunshiny day.

By this time, Helena and Lucy were both quite satisfied with the manner of their new life in the dales. They had made themselves little household interests; they gardened, they had pets of fowls, and their interludes of talk about Grandmamma Gwynne and dear old Everham were becoming more and more rare, until, by and by, they promised to lapse into the past and to be almost forgotten in the way of regret. Laurence Warleigh bore the kind of life pretty well. He trudged by his wife's pony far and near in all their wanderings, for he was a famous pedestrian; and at home he was forever at her elbow, reading to her, admiring her bits of work, and occasionally offering her a little willing but awkward assistance. A very charming picture of Darby and Joan in the heyday of love they made.

One day when Rachel Withers was up at the Hurdlemere House, Helena took her into her little oratory, which was a quaint room projecting over the great porch, with three narrow arched windows looking three separate ways. She had decorated it rather fantastically, as it seemed to Protestant Rachel, with transparencies of saints against the lights east and west, while, reared up in front of the center one, was a crucifix—the cross in ebony, the figure in ivory, very finely carved. Every inch of wainscot bore a picture, a garland, or some symbol of her faith. Here, also, were her devotional books, and when Laurence was not with her this was her favorite retreat. She was a sincere, pious soul as ever breathed. Once she told Rachel that she had had thoughts of becoming a nun, and called it a "blessed vocation," but perhaps she found it a still more blessed vocation to be Laurence Warleigh's wife. He did his utmost to make up to her for the lack of all other friends and affection, and, apparently, with full success. Whatever her wicked little secret that she kept so close, it was not fretting her now; each time that Rachel saw her she looked brighter and happier than the last.

"I wonder whether I shall be as happy when I am married!" thought Rachel, and followed the speculation up with a sigh. Was that sigh ominous of some doubt creeping in? That she had her troubles we have good reason to know.

It was about this time—early in June—that she went over with John to pay a three days' visit at Floyd's Seat—a visit which had been promised and put off, and promised and put off it would be hard to say how frequently since their return to Hurdledale. The Grantleys were hospitable people, and never of their own will had their house empty. There was a dinner-party the first evening, to which came Mr. Gilsland in very high feather and his most lover-like and amiable mood. Rachel was content that night, for nobody jeered her or flouted him; he was not intimate with the Grantleys, and for her sake they inclined to think him a pleasing person.

On the following day there was the Annual Archery Meeting held in the grounds, and to assist at it came a considerable muster of company from all round the neighborhood, which made it the pleasantest, gayest entertainment that Hurdledale had seen since last summer's closing picnic at Prior's Bank. Rachel Withers never pretended to deny that she was fond of a little cheerful society; and as the curate again appeared on the scene, and again in his genial temper, she had the promise of a day of bliss before her. But it was not destined to go over without a little speck or two of bitterness.

The most talked-about and conspicuous person at Floyd's Seat on this memorable occasion was that Miss Briggs, who has been mentioned once already, as having distinguished herself by being taken faint in church at Kitty Anderside's wedding. But she was very far from being taken faint now; for she had just fallen into a surprising great fortune by the death of an eccentric old kinswoman, who, though she would never see her as long as she was alive, had made up for the neglect now by bequeathing to her all her possessions—to the prejudice, it was said, of a couple of nephews, whom she had brought up

in the expectation of being her heirs. Now an heiress is always interesting, and though Miss Briggs was rather old to be still a young woman, she had not given up irrevocably her pretensions to youthfulness; and her accession to fortune did, no doubt, materially lessen the sum of her years. Rumor varied as to the amount of her inheritance; some persons said it was five thousand a year, others reduced it to two; but let the facts be what they might, the poor spinster had received a mighty increase of wealth, and betrayed, by every air and gesture, that she felt herself to be a person of magnified importance in the eyes of society.

Rachel Withers had heard of her great good luck, and expected to see her flourishing in all the gloss and crispness of new mourning; but old habits are not got over in a day, and Miss Briggs had apparently adapted to her own service some of the rustiest relics in her deceased kinswoman's wardrobe; for she was wonderfully equipped in an aged black lutestring, tight in the sleeves, with epaulettes, and a rigid economy of breadth in the skirt. Over it she wore a little velvet pelerine, trimmed with bugles, and to crown all, a chip bonnet of antediluvian shape, embellished with a broad, drooping feather on each side. Her unusual splendor gave rise to much criticism amongst her numerous acquaintance; but she bore herself throughout the day with the serene self-possession of a woman who feels herself exceedingly well-dressed; and so she was well-dressed for Betsy Briggs, with sixty pounds a year, but for Miss Briggs, the fortunate heiress, she was, perhaps, rather behind the fashion—at least, people said so who were lately from Paris.

She was always a plain woman, but she never looked plainer than on this public occasion; for her affectations and *minauderies* were carried over the borders of the grotesque. It appeared more than once as if she were striving to act up to some comical conception she had formed of what a rich woman ought to be. Not one word did she utter without contortions of eyes, mouth and peaked-up nose, which she elevated in the air, as if snuffing admiration, while she stepped to and fro the lawn amongst the company, viewing herself on either side with the complacency and self-delight of a six-year old child in its holiday-clothes. Oh! she felt grand!

She was not a sweet-natured woman at heart, and the unexpected rise in her fortunes seemed to have brought out in full flavor two or three latent qualities not commonly accounted pleasant. "Yes, ma'am," and "No, sir," were her humble formulas in past times, and to Mrs. Sara Grandage, who was rather arbitrary, but who had done her a thousand substantial kindnesses when she needed them, she was then especially deferential; but now to Rachel Withers' mischievous amusement, she quite changed her tone—soothed her, advised her, and referred to the precautions necessary at her time of life, though she knew as well as any body that her ancient patroness hated to hear her age or infirmities spoken of.

It was a queer scene for an onlooker. Bittersweet's bright black eyes sparkled with ire; she always had a repugnance for Miss Briggs as a fawner and toady, even while she pitied and assisted her; but now she was thoroughly disgust-

ed, and declared she was more odious with her new fortune than ever she had been in her low estate.

"But there is one consolation," added she, spitefully, addressing her goddaughter; "she is such a mean-spirited thing, she will never have the heart to spend her money; she will indulge herself in the pleasures of accumulation—very dear to many who have known poverty!"

Rachel had her sly little laugh at her god-mamma, but her own turn with Miss Briggs was coming by and by. That lady was one of Mr. Gilsland's very few admirers in Brafferton, and Bittersweet liked to tease Rachel by saying the lean spinster had a secret *tendresse* for him; and he for her cups of comfortable bohea. Of course, Rachel could afford to bear these jibes good-humoredly—she knew the curate's real opinion of old Miss Briggs. Nevertheless she felt a spasm of very genuine and undignified vexation when the heiress came up to her and whispered in her sharp, tittering, lackadaisical way—

"He! he! Miss Rachel, so you and Mr. Gilsland are to marry! When? When he jumps into a fat rectory, and your ship comes home with your fortune? It will be another case of Kitty Anderside and the gray curate, I expect—twenty years' courtship and a parsonage in the Potteries at last!"

Rachel wished the spinster could have heard a few of the curate's latest criticisms on her own fascinations, then would she have been sweetly avenged for this insolence; but as her benevolent aspirations were only made in her own heart, Miss Briggs retired uninjured and triumphant. She did not like Rachel Withers, for some reason best known to herself, and it was an intense satisfaction to her to feel that she had planted one thorn at least in that successful young woman's bosom.

But in the course of the day Rachel came in for her compensations. Other old friends congratulated her, and said kind things to her; and though Mrs. Sara Grandage would not have been Bittersweet had she not done her little best to dash her goddaughter's contentment, she was not so resolutely malicious as usual. She caught Rachel once standing alone, while Mr. Gilsland, who had been her companion until a moment before, was speaking aside with a stranger; she was smiling to herself at a pleasant thought, and looking so superlatively silly that the opportunity for railery was too good to be lost.

"Oh, you beatified goose!" cried the old lady, making a comical caricature of her attitude and expression. "Do let the natural woman come out a little more. What is your lip curled up to your nose for if you are to turn out sentimental? I would never have stood godmother for you if I could have believed you would!"

Here Mr. Gilsland, having done with his friend, advanced to join Rachel, on which Bittersweet withdrew herself, pursing up her mouth and saying, "Now we are going to look niminy-piminy again!"

He asked what were her charming remarks, but did not press for an answer; he knew very well that he was no favorite with the sarcastic old lady at Prior's Bank, and distrusted her accordingly.

John Withers and his sister were remaining

at Floyd's Seat over the following day, and therefore they witnessed the dispersion of the general company; and it was not without a pang of acute wrath, that Rachel saw Miss Briggs offer, and Mr. Gilsland accept, a seat in the hired pony-chaise in which the heiress was returning to Brafferton. Mrs. Sara Grandage looked on rejoicing, and with a sudden inspiration of wickedness, said to her suffering goddaughter—"An engagement is not final, Dumpling—nothing is final but a marriage; what will you bet me that your beautiful curate is not fitting a new string to his bow?"

If a reproachful glance could have killed, Bittersweet had never stirred again from that hour!

III.

"What respect the world pays to money! What court old Miss Briggs receives since the fame of her fortunes spread through the dales! Yesterday when John and I drove into Brafferton there were two carriages standing at her door, and ours made the third—I would not have called, but John said I must. When we got into her stuffy little parlor, there we found the Grantleys and Carltons, whom she was entertaining with conversation in her grand new manner, only dropping now and then by accident into her old servile style. We had not paid her a visit since she came to her kingdom, and she received us with the loftiest patronage; we were the last friends who had honored her, she said. Oh, Bittersweet, how odious money makes odious people!" This moral tag to her story issued with a good deal of expletive force from Mistress Rachel Withers' lips, and her god-mamma encouraged her to go on with the tale of her visit to the heiress; it was excellent fun to the old lady to see her put out of temper. Until lately she had been almost monotonously sweet and soft; but nature was asserting herself again without the poor girl's precisely knowing why.

"Well, we had not been there many minutes," continued she, "when in came Mr. Gilsland, bringing Miss Briggs a little pamphlet which it appeared she had commissioned him to procure for her; and she was so diffusive in her thanks that he tried to stop her—but she would not be stopped until she had had her say out. Then the Grantleys and Carltons took leave, and as soon as they were gone, again did she rehearse her fulsome—"So *very* much indebted, so very kind indeed of you, Mr. Gilsland," as if he had walked to London and back for her, until John's face expanded into an irrepressible grin, to cover what he begged to ask, if it were no secret, what this precious pamphlet was about? And she began to say she was not *sure* she might tell, with such an affectation of archness and mystery as put Mr. Gilsland quite out of countenance. I could see he was intensely provoked!"

Bittersweet laughed enjoyingly.

"I wish I had been there!" said she.

"And after all," proceeded Rachel, "the paper turned out to be neither more nor less than the prospectus of some inferior school where the orphaned sons of clergymen are received at a lower charge than other pupils, and that she wanted the information to help her to dispose of that brace of luckless lads whom her cousin's caprice has left dependent on her tender mer-

cies. She squeezed my hand impressively as I was coming away, and whispered in confidence, 'You see, my dear, a single woman must seek an adviser amongst her friends when her responsibilities are so great as mine.' 'Why don't you go to Mr. Anderside, then?' said I, and left her quite annoyed. Affected old thing! Mr. Gilsland took his hat to accompany us, but on some pretense or other she managed to detain him, and we saw him no more; for we drove straight home after a visit to the rectory. Twice or thrice on the way John broke out into his merry, enjoying laugh, for which there was no excuse that I could see; and when I made him tell me why he did it, he only asked 'if I had no sense of humor, and said that scene in Miss Briggs' parlor was the finest bit of comedy he had ever witnessed. Perhaps I might have thought so too if any body but Mr. Gilsland had taken the chief rôle in it; as it was I am afraid my temper got the better of me, for I exclaimed passionately that Miss Briggs was a detestable woman! which set John off again into a perfect peal of laughter—and it was ridiculous."

Thus far Mistress Rachel with unembarrassed fluency; and then she melted into a flood of tears. Her godmamma looked on as she had listened—with delightful composure; and as soon as the shower was over, said with perfect confidence in the wisdom of the advice she was offering, "Dumpling, if that man gives you the chance, quarrel with him."

"But I don't want to quarrel with him," sobbed Rachel, "and it is all her fault!"

"Then, my dear, he will quarrel with you. I will bet you a thousand pounds to a penny that your faithful swain has fitted a new string to his bow." Bittersweet spoke with the calm assurance of fate, and though, of course, Rachel did not believe her, the words went down into her heart and made it heavy.

The following day Mr. Gilsland was due at the rectory, but he disappointed Rachel and did not come—it was the first time he had failed of his appointment yet. When it grew so late that she knew it was useless to go on expecting him, she set off for a walk upon the moor alone. On reaching the ridge of the fell that looked over into Mirkdale, there she stumbled on Laurence Warleigh and Helena, seated on a plaid amongst the heather enjoying the splendid June sunset. Helena was looking marvelously lovely, there was the softest, saintliest expression in her eyes. What they had been speaking of before Rachel interrupted them, she could not tell, but the moment Laurence espied her he sprang up exclaiming, "Here is Rachel Withers, now let us be gay! Tell us the news in the dales, Rachel, or how the world wags beyond them!"

There was a little effort in his manner, and Rachel would gladly have excused herself, and left them to their own company, but they would not permit her to escape, and they walked as far as the High-beck together. The stream was rippling over the stones with a pleasant fullness of sound, and somewhere down in Mirkdale there was the ringing of church-bells which chimed musically in with its melody. It was a sweet summer landscape such as Rachel would have enjoyed with the inmost fiber of her nature, had not a strange feeling of doubt and

depression kept thrusting itself like a cloud betwixt her and its beauty. She carried the haunting presentiment home with her, and asked herself a hundred times during that dreary, sleepless night—could all the world be just in lightly esteeming her lover, and she alone wrong in taking him for a true man?

IV.

Said Bittersweet with good-humored sarcasm, "There is the wooing that is all butter and honey, the wooing that is all sugar and spice, and the wooing that is all scratch and claw, snap and snarl—which is yours, Dumpling? If you grow thin and ugly over it, I will never forgive you!"

"Am I growing thin and ugly over it? I am a good deal worried in my mind, and that is the fact"—a great confession this for a girl like Rachel Withers to make, especially to a woman who had been against her all along. She made it about a month after the archery gathering at Floyd's Seat, since which her tender little affairs had been going altogether wrong. She wished she were a little happier. She could not persuade herself into a belief that she either was contented, or ought to be contented, while things continued as they were. It was quite impossible to guess what had lately come over Mr. Gilsland; she never felt less bright or cheerful than after a walk and talk with him; he wore and discouraged her mind with complaints and gloomy previsions as empty often as they were useless. John Withers had ceased to intermeddle either one way or another; he saw his sister was worried, but she had made her engagement with her eyes open, and in defiance of his opinion, and she must bear the brunt of discovering her mistake—an engagement was a more serious business in his views than in Bittersweet's—she would have broken a dozen rather than not. How different this love-making was to what poor Rachel fancied! No pleasant, sunshiny hours of quiet converse now their mutual strangeness was gone—nothing but thorns, prickles, uneasiness!

"If I knew how to satisfy him I would do it—he knows I would, and yet he is always finding fault with me," said she in pitiful, querulous accents, which were balm to her god-mamma's ears.

Only the last time he was at the rectory he had said to her with cutting coldness, "You have no sympathy with me, Rachel; you never attempt to realize my position. If I tell you how Mr. Anderside leaves the burden of the parish on my shoulders, you answer that he is growing an old man—as if *that* had anything to do with it. A little condolence would please me far better than your constant cheerfulness. You do not feel how alien to all my tastes and all my habits is the stagnation of provincial society. I die in it—sometimes I am capable of any rashness to deliver myself from it. You suggest that I should resign my curacy here and seek another elsewhere—that does not sound as if you valued my company much, but I will let it pass as well-meant, though I must remind you that curacies with stipends of one hundred and fifty pounds a year are not waiting to drop into my mouth directly I open it. No, I see nothing before me but years of this distasteful

drudgery! It is sheer madness for a gentleman to take orders unless he have large private means or powerful patronage; and I have neither money nor friends at court."

Rachel could not answer him—his thoughts were not her thoughts, nor his hopes her hopes: she never could have imagined how widely they differed unless she had pledged herself to share them. She would have been very happy during a long day of small things with affection to shiue on it, but she began to perceive with shrinking reluctance that Mr. Gilsland did not love her as a man must love the woman he marries if she is to enjoy any measure of content—yet still she clung to him.

"Give him up—I would never be so poor-spirited as to bind myself to a man who did not care for me!" cried Bittersweet, contemptuously. "Besides, it is both foolish and wrong."

"You might as well say it is foolish and wrong to have a pug-nose—it may be against the laws of beauty, but it is not against the laws of nature. And it is my nature to go on loving what I have once loved though it disappoint me ever so," answered Rachel with a bitter earnestness.

"So much the worse for you!" said her god-mamma, and ceased from her reasoning. The sagacious old lady knew that patience, time and the hour would bring this troublesome affair to the end she desired to see.

And in fact that end came very shortly. One day early in August Mr. Gilsland walked over to the rectory; it was sultry weather, and he arrived there very hot, tired and dusty; very much out of love with the world and with himself. Rachel met him less gracefully than usual; she also was heated and weary with a tedious morning amongst the children in the school; and an uncomfortable doubt and dread of him was in her mind. There was thunder in their moral atmosphere, and a general tendency toward storm.

They talked a little while on common things, verging gradually toward personal interests, Rachel becoming more and more conscious every moment that the curate had something to say which he had yet a difficulty in bringing out. She did not help him with a single word—she had quite enough to do to keep guard over herself.

At last it came, awkwardly, blunderingly, but still it came. Mr. Gilsland was not without a sense of the proprieties, and he knew he was doing a hazardous deed, but he did not stiek at doing it. He told Rachel that when he made her an offer of marriage he was under the impression that she possessed a considerable fortune, and he implied that she had herself deceived him.

This insinuation she passed by; he knew he was lying, and she knew that he knew it—but to the first part of his statement she made answer with a steady little face and more dignity than was usual with her,—“No, Alfred, I have only a thousand pounds, and I think I must have told you so.” *She* had not told him so, but he had been aware of the fact some months; John had given him the information when he permitted the engagement. “I think I must have told you so,” repeated Rachel, and then looking straight into his eyes, she added, “but if you repent of your promise I will not hold you to it.”

This was precisely what he wanted to bring her to, but he was excessively angry when it was achieved. He called her all the cold-hearted things in the world, and finally went away in a rage. But he never came to the rectory again, and Rachel Withers' little love-story was ended.

CHAPTER THE FIFTH.

IN THE WINTERLY WEATHER.

THE blank gray was not made to blast her hair.—BYRON.

I.

THERE was something again a little amiss with Laurence Warleigh's wife. Her spirits that were so even were becoming as uncertain as the winds. She fretted about Laurence, and fancied she saw often a look of tedium creeping over his face; her tender heart was smitten with many an aching fear lest the present existence of sweet idleness might grow flat, stale, and burdensome to him. Then, quite forgetful of herself, she urged him to make a change, though what change she could never suggest; but he always answered her that Hurtledeale satisfied him, and until she wearied of it there they would remain.

By tacit consent, they never mentioned Whinstane or his sisters now, and in this instance Laurence Warleigh's passive stubbornness of endurance began strongly to manifest itself; for though he resented the neglect of his family in silence, he resented it with a very deep displeasure. No doubt but that Helena brooded over it too. She had some cruel moments of self-torment from the thought that she it was who had alienated Laurence from his own people, and many a dread lest a time might come when she should not be there to compensate him for what he had lost. But was he not separated from them almost as widely before he married her? though a door of reconciliation was then open to him had he chosen to avail himself of it. It was a pity that either of them should suffer the matter to weigh on their hearts, however; for what was Sir William Warleigh that any one should heed his displeasure?

There is nothing in this world without alloy. Fondly and faithfully as they loved each other, there were thorns, and sharp ones, in their rose-garden of Eden.

Visitors they had none, besides John Withers and his sister. They were quite out of the world. Laurence Warleigh's bringing up at Whinstane had isolated him from companions of his own age and standing, and his wandering life before his marriage had helped still further to keep him poor in friends near home. Neither were his present circumstances such as to tempt the gentlefolks of the dales to lay aside their mossy dignity and make advances to the unknown son of the notorious Sir William Warleigh, even did not the distance of the Hurtledeale House from all their civilized dwellings make a visit thither in the best of weather a hard day's work. The Damer Warleighs, who might have brought them forward, were gone abroad, and they, therefore, lived entirely to themselves; and it was not to be marvelled at if Laurence did now and then crave some more

muscular mental diet than his fair young wife's society could afford him.

As the summer and autumn passed over, and November winds began to scatter the leaves in the woods, Helena grew worse. Some unconfessed source of trouble influenced her spirits capriciously. She had long and apparently causeless fits of weeping, and days when she would sit still, pale and speechless, from morning to night. Merry little Doctor Beane who attended her, made light of her freaks, but during the last few weeks Laurence had several times mooted anxiously the advisability of carrying her away from the loneliness of Hurtledeale; and he would undoubtedly have done so had she not now been herself averse to move.

It was one day about this time that she took her courage in her hands, and begged Laurence to let her write to his sisters—she wanted them to forgive her for taking him from them; to think of her gently, though they were never to meet, she pleaded: it would be a happiness to her to know that they did not *quite* hate and despise her. Poor girls, they would have received her with open arms and open hearts had the chance been allowed them! He would not at first, but a little more entreaty prevailed, and he gave her reluctant leave to do as she wished, though he forewarned her of ill-success. She refused to be discouraged, however: she thought she would have skill to move the hearts of two women whose own lives were not very happy, and she addressed them together.

It was a simple, touching little letter that she wrote. Katherine's proud throat swelled as she read it, and Grace cried aloud that she would set off to Hurtlemere that very hour; then their father's coarse voice recalled them to themselves, asking what they were sniveling about, and commanding them to band him the letter. He snarled and swore over it a good deal, then flung it on the fire, and, with vindictive bitterness, forbade them to answer it at their peril. Katherine was haughtily silent, but Grace burst into a passion of tears, and was hustled out of the room by her sister to escape their father's rage. Oliver discreetly held his peace, taking neither part, but a day or two after, when Sir William showed signs of relenting before his daughters' persistent entreaties that he would allow them to go over and see Laurence's wife, he spoke strongly against it; sneered their petition down, and said it was a very mean expedient in his brother to let Helena's pen plead for their restoration to favor. Lady Georgina took the same self-interested view of it, and Sir William—always most angry when he thought himself cajoled—renewed his stern injunction to his daughters against either writing or going to the Hurtledeale House. And thus it came to pass that poor Helena's pathetic appeal went unnoticed.

Each succeeding day after it was sent, Laurence or Mathew Dobie went down to the post as soon as the letters were in to inquire if there had come any reply. She too would go to the gate to shorten her suspense in waiting for their return, and it was cruel to see the disappointed yet hopeful air with which she met the empty-handed messenger returning during the first week. "Nothing yet—perhaps they are away, and it may come to-morrow." But for many

to-morrows it did not come, and as the conviction of her utter failure forced itself on her mind she became more despondent and tearful than ever.

Mistress Dobie reasoned with her solemnly, for she perceived that it drove her master almost mad when he saw his darling thus causelessly distrust. "He loves you as his very life is bound up in you," urged the worthy old woman; "an' how can you heed any body's unchristian spite when that's so? I wouldn't, not I! It behooves you to cheer up and be merry for all sakes; I don't know what Mrs. Damer 'ud say, an' she could see that pitiful face!"

Then poor Helena strove with her weakness, but as she mournfully said, she could not help it. Dr. Beane bade them be patient with her, and prophesied that in due time all would be right again and the little lady happier than ever; but his cunning eye had lately discerned that she had a secret fear on her mind; he could not persuade it out of her, and he said to himself with misgiving—"The child has got it into her head that she is going to die."

And that was just what Helena had got into her head—foolish Lucy had told her weeping in the spring that the White Hands had been seen hovering over her from the very night Laurence had brought her home, and as her hour of trial drew near, she made up her mind that she *must* die and leave him—*die and leave him*; and all her bitter tears and anguish betrayed how little able she was yet to resign herself and go!

II.

The last time that Rachel Withers saw Helena was in the ensuing January. She found her fitfully gay; Laurence had received a long letter from Mrs. Damer Warleigh announcing their speedy return to Bristowe, and this had enlivened her. He went out for a walk, leaving his wife and her friend together, and they had a gossip over the traveler's news, during which Helena smiled more genuinely than she had smiled for months. But the brightness did not last. When she passed from foreign adventures to speak of Mrs. Damer Warleigh's influence at Whinstane, her face clouded over again with a weary depression. "She is my last hope of a reconciliation between Laurence and his family," said she. "If any thing should happen to me he will never forgive them—the breach will never be healed. By any means and on any terms, I yearn for it to be closed before my child is born."

Mistress Dobie had occasion to enter the room while Rachel was there, and on Helena's remarking that the lowering of the storm-clouds reminded her of the weather when Laurence brought her home to the Hurtlemere House, "What a long, long time ago!" she looked round at the gentle creature and exclaimed: "Deed but you'll find t' years 'll be short enew by an' by! As you grow auld like me you'll hardlings care to count 'em, they'll flee so fast."

A convulsive shudder ran through Helena's frame from head to foot, and with a smile more touching than any tears, she said, "It was only the White Hands over my head—I feel them often now. Do you think they are blessing me to a long life, Mistress Dobie, or do they hover over me for a warning, 'that the blank gray was not made to blast my hair'?"

"White Hands and fash!" exclaimed the dame with well-acted contempt but genuine alarm; "my dear lady, it is but an auld wife's tale that you shouldn't give heed to—more shame to me that telled you! Ignorant folk take up wi' that sort o' logic, but it is not for us as knows better. Pray, never let Master Laurence hear you go on wi' that."

Helena glanced at Rachel half amused, but when Mistress Dobie had gone out she said very quietly and resignedly, "Don't call me weak, Rachel, but ever since I got to know how they told a story in the dale that the White Hands were seen over my head from the first night that Laurence brought me here, I have felt sure I shall not live. I kept it to myself and fretted over it terribly once, but it does not weigh on me so sadly now. God has given me peace, but my heart breaks for Laurence! We have been very happy together—I am only a little fondling thing, but oh, how he loves me! It is almost pain to think of it now; I wish I might have staid with him a little, *little* longer. And he does not know—he does not know that I must go!"

Rachel Withers could never afterward recall her words, and the look on her face, without the tears starting to her eyes. She said whatever she could think of to reassure and comfort her, but to what purpose was it reasoning against such a fixed imagination—a prevision so likely to bring about its own fulfillment? When Laurence Warleigh returned from his walk, she kissed Helena good-by and went away—kissed her and said good-by for the last time! Mistress Dobie let her out at the front door, and whispered earnestly as she did so, "Oh, Miss Rachel, don't be long o' seeing my dear lady again. She frets sorely after being friends wi' them proud misses at Whinstane; she'd fain bespeak their kindness for th' lile bairn she thinks she'll ha' to leave as soon as it comes into this cauld world; and her heart does not misgie her for naught, I know."

No; Helena's sweet face looked like one that was never to grow old, and the Shadow of Death was haunting the dim chambers of the Hurtlemere House already.

III.

It was through a heavy snow-storm that Mrs. Damer Warleigh, two days after her return to Bristowe, rode up to Hurtlemere, an urgent letter from Laurence having reached her by a special messenger at noon. It was night when she arrived, and every thing was dark except a single thread of light stealing through a chink in the closed shutters of an upper chamber. The deep snow muffled the sound of the horse's feet, and no one appeared to admit her until after a second and lengthy summons. At last Mistress Dobie presented herself at the door, looking dull and bewildered, like a person suddenly awakened out of the leaden sleep of utter exhaustion; and as Mrs. Damer Warleigh stepped across the threshold, she said, with laconic despair: "She's dead—it's all ower, an' she's dead, an' done wi' her troubles!"

The visitor asked for Laurence, and was answered: "He's out somewhere i' the storm; bite nor sup hasn't passed his lips sin' morning. Oh! Mrs. Damer, but we ha' had a time o' it!"

Mrs. Damer Warleigh walked through the

house into the kitchen, and stood before the fire, the snow melting from her in tiny rills as **Magsie**, stupefied with crying, relieved her from some of her heaviest wraps. **Mathew Dobie** was smoking his pipe in his chimney-corner with his usual calm philosophy; **Lucy** was not visible, and **Mrs. Damer** asked for her.

"She's gotten charge o' t' babe, an' as it keeps her fra fretting, that's ane bother out o' hand," replied **Miss Dobie**. **Mathew** now considerably proposed to go with his lantern in search of his master, and bring him in, but his wife thought he had better let him be. "It don't do to mell' wi' folk i' his frame o' mind, they comes to best by thersels," said she. "He wer worse nor mad this morning—it wer awfu' to see him. An' oh, the wicked, wicked words he spoke! I hope God A'mighty don't hearken to men when they're out o' thersels? She were sensible to the last, poor pretty cretur that she was, an' good as pretty!" **Mrs. Damer** inquired if the child was a boy or a girl.

"A girl, an' it's not amiss considering. No fear but it'll live, **Doctor Beane** says; an' we ha' sent for **Mary Wray**, as has just lost her own baby, to come nurse it. **Lucy** has ta'en to it amazing, an' I ha' shifted 'em quite out o' **Master Laurence's** way; for oh! **Mrs. Damer**, I don't think he's *safe*. When she was gone, he flung out into t' storm like ane possessed, an' he has never come nigh hand t' door-stane since. It's cruel to see her lyin' there, an' him raving demented out up o' t' fell. There I see him this afternoon crying—Lord, how he was crying! Them at **Whinstane's** gotten much to answer for, indeed ha' they."

After some time **Miss Dobie** led the way to the silent chamber where **Helena** was lying in her dreamless death-slumber—poor little loving, aching heart at rest forever! **Mrs. Damer** could not refrain herself from weeping aloud as she gazed at the marble face, and remembered the happy young wife she had left in her earthly Eden but a few months ago.

While they were standing there the hall-door opened and shut, and **Miss Dobie** said in a frightened undertone:

"That's **Master Laurence's** foot coming in wi' **Mathew**—pray he don't break out again!" and she would have closed the door, had not **Mrs. Damer** said, "No, let him meet her there;" and the next moment he came into the room, drenched, wild, incoherent.

The kind old lady took his hand and said: "Ah! **Laurence**, I did not look for such a greeting as this! It is a bitter, bitter bereavement, but God's will be done!"

"Was it God's will? Nay, it was their devilish pride and cruelty that killed her!" exclaimed he hoarsely. "She could not bear it—it broke her heart. They killed her; I say, they killed her; hell's curse upon them all!" and his voice rose to an awful cry.

"Hush, **Laurie**, hush, in this holy presence," whispered **Mrs. Damer**. Her tone and manner subdued his frenzy, but when she would have had him quit the room with her, he stubbornly refused, and staid all night watching by the unconscious clay. The last twelve hours had done on him the work of half a lifetime.

As soon as the news reached **Whinstane** that **Laurence's** wife had borne a living child and

was dead, **Sir William Warleigh** sent **Oliver** over with leave for her to be laid in the vault at **Penslaven**; but **Laurence** refused to see his brother, and returned for all answer that neither her dust nor his should ever come to the place of his kinsfolk. She was buried, therefore, in **Hurtledale** churchyard just below the chancel-window.

While **Helena** lay dead in the house, **John Withers** was sent for to baptize her child. The name given to it was *Annis*.

IV.

As the winter went on **Laurence Warleigh** settled down again in a certain fashion, if that can be called settling in which every hour of a man's life is marred by a tormented restlessness, a feverish impatience, and anger against God, against his kinsfolk, and against himself. His kind nature was embittered, his generous temper warped and soured. He went and came about his house in a dogged silence, dark, down-looking, and miserable. He suffered the canker of resentment to eat into his heart, and was as deaf to all overtures from **Whinstane** as **Whinstane** had been to his while **Helena** lived. **Mrs. Damer Warleigh** and the **Squire** spent themselves in urging him to leave **Hurtlemere**, with its many sorrowful memories, even if he resumed the wandering life he led before his marriage; but all in vain. He expressed a determination never to remove from the house where his darling and he lived through their brief happiness; and though not much weight could be attached to a resolution entered into in a season of vehement grief, the event proved that he had as much tenacity of remembrance as quickness of suffering. His old charm of manner, his fire and freedom, were quite gone, and in their stead reigned a harsh sullenness, which **Miss Dobie** excused by pleading that he was not at all times himself—that he was half mad, in fact; and, indeed, his conduct was marked in many instances with something stronger than eccentricity. **Mathew Dobie** averred that there was no little of **Sir William's** wild blood in him, and that a dour man would he be if he lived and let it get the better of his mother's milk.

He testified no thought for his child, and if it were brought of set purpose in his way he never noticed it, greatly to the ire of its foster-mother, of **Lucy**, and of the other womankind in the house. The little creature being named **Annis**, and born on a Friday, was, according to all old wives' prognostics, predestined to be much under spiritual influences, and unlucky in its temporal concerns; but thanks to the care and good nursing of **Mary Wray**, in its infancy it grew and thrived apace.

It was about midway in the month of March that **Katherine Warleigh** did rather a venturesome thing in defiance of her father's commands. She rode over into **Hurtledale**, having left the Tower alone by the connivance of a favorite servant before the rest of the household were astir, and arrived at the rectory just as **John Withers** and his sister were sitting down to breakfast. She had come with the determination of seeing **Laurence** and his child, and of persuading him if possible to be reconciled with them at home; **Sir William's** wrath was rising

again after a temporary lull, and Oliver was doing his utmost to keep it warm; now or never, therefore, must be reünion.

The brilliant freshness of the morning had tinged Katherine's cheeks with an exquisite bloom, and made her look exceedingly handsome, but when she came to sit quiet and talk troubles over, her countenance fell, and the beauty dropped away from it. Her account of the state of affairs at Whinstane was not cheering; Sir William was as violent and tyrannical as ever, and Oliver and Oliver's wife ruled the household despotically. Katherine was by no means inclined to think her sister-in-law's presence at the Tower an advantage.

Grace's correspondence with Arthur Hill had been discovered about six months before, and at Oliver's instigation peremptorily forbidden, and her naturally weak health and spirits had sunk, in consequence, lower than ever. Oliver carried all with a high hand, and appeared to be feathering his own future nest luxuriously out of the convertible wealth of the estate; but to his wife the monotony and dreariness of life in the dales was a most irksome bondage. She kept almost as much in her own rooms as did Lady Foulis, and had brought no society whatever about the Tower. Katherine described her as a highly accomplished, frigid woman, very plain, but elegant and distinguished in air and manner. She was the daughter of a spendthrift Irish earl, and had been educated abroad; she was full ten years older than Oliver, and the fortune for which he had the credit of having married her, came from her settlement at her first marriage with a great brewer; in this he had not been very far-sighted, however, for at her death the whole of it would revert to the family of her first husband. Her children—she had two now—were kept in superlative good order. "Indeed," said Katherine, "they are trained never to speak above their breath, and as for *erying*—they dare not do it! Even the baby is subdued, and behaves as beautifully as if it were made of wax and moved with wires."

She had fifty questions to ask about Laurence and his little daughter, but John and Rachel could only tell her what they heard by common report themselves. They never saw him now except at a distance riding along the road; he had not been inside their doors nor they inside his since the day of Helena's funeral. Mary Wray lived up at the Hurtlemere House, and little Annis was said to be "a mighty fine bairn;" but John, who baptized her, was no judge of babies, and Rachel had not seen her. They showed Katherine Helena's grave under the chancel window; there was no memorial stone upon it—only a young cedar that Laurence had planted with his own hands a few days after she was buried. In reference to that letter, the neglect of which had caused Helena such bitter pain, Katherine said explicitly that had not Oliver interfered, Sir William would have granted her request, and have permitted them to come over; he was in great hopes her child would prove a boy, and intimated that if it did, he would make its birth the occasion of forgiving his son, and of doing what he called "the right thing" by him. His rage and disappointment were terrible when the last news

reached him, and there was such an angry division betwixt him and Oliver for some time that there was every probability of the second establishment at Whinstane being driven away. But Oliver was conciliatory and plausible, and had made himself so necessary to his father that the breach was of no long continuance.

When Katherine had rested at the rectory about an hour, John Withers went up with her over the moor to the Hurtlemere House; but Laurence was gone out on horseback no one could tell her whither, and from the orders given to Mathew Dobie before he started, he was not looked for back until nightfall. This was grievously disappointing after the risk of her father's anger that she had run; but she saw the child, and thought its appearance and tendence all that could be desired. Mary Wray was affectionately attached to her nursing.

This was scarcely the opportunity for John to advance his own cause, but nevertheless he drew some encouragement from Katherine's visit. Oliver had put a period to Arthur Hill's correspondence with his sister Grace on the score of inferior position, and the same plea might be raised against himself; but Katherine would be less easily turned aside than Grace when her feelings were once engaged. On the whole he gathered some hope from her having betaken herself to the rectory, as to a place where she should find sure friends; and Rachel threw her word into the balance with it, by saying that their preference, though still unspoken, was mutual, and to an observer quite evident.

v.

Two days after Katherine's ride into Hurtle-dale there came a rumor that Sir William Warleigh was dead—rumor was right for once; he was dead, and Sir Laurence was come to his kingdom!

It would have been sheer hypocrisy to put on faces of sorrow. Kester Greaves even came to the rectory to ask if he was to ring the bells for the new Squire. "Not until the old Squire is buried," replied his master; and then the man seemed to understand that such premature public rejoicing would be indecent. "But," muttered he, as he retired from the study door, "that don't prevent folks fra' being glad all t' same."

It did not—Sir William Warleigh's death was a positive source of relief and congratulation to many. There is always hope in the heir, and Sir Laurence could scarcely fail to reign better than his father had done. Whinstandale began to look forward to happier days than it had enjoyed for many years. It seemed doubtful to the sagacious, however, whether he would fulfill their expectations; for his first exercise of his new dignity was a refusal to attend at his father's funeral—a measure which every body reprobated with horror, and none more loudly than his brother Oliver.

The old Squire's death had happened in this wise. He was thrown from his horse when out hunting, but no bones were broken, and except from the shock, he did not appear at first to have sustained any material injury. He was alarmed for himself, however, and bade Oliver summon his son Laurence.

"Pooh, pooh," said Oliver, "let us see how you go on."

The next day Sir William became more urgent. "I will see Laurence; I tell you it is all over with me, and I must see him." Oliver pacified his impatience by promising to send for his brother on the morrow, but he did not send; and on the third day Sir William was dead.

When the funeral procession was formed and ready to start, there happened a curious incident. Down from her Tower came Lady Foulis draped in heaviest mourning, and took her place as chief in it. It was whispered about that she was Sir William's *mother*, and those who had seen him in his coffin averred, that he showed in his dead visage something of the old Warleigh race that living he had never shown.

Then were the old stories revived to be a nine days' wonder, and to fade back again into fable-land, when the gossips' tongues were tired of wagging. Colonel Warleigh's legend of his finding of the child, which had gained universal credence at the time he invented and circulated it, was never disbelieved until fifty years were gone and the object of it was in his grave.

"Well," said old Mr. Anderside, when he heard the last bit that had been added to the marvelous story; "I never gave the Colonel credit for so much ingenuity in lying. He told me the tale with his own lips, and I took it to be as true as gospel; there must have been something desperately bad in the facts when he made that cloak for them. But there is no profit that I know of to be got out of speculating on them at this time of day——"

There was not, and besides the dales' world in general had quite enough to do in speculating about the heir—a much more interesting subject of talk than any dead Squire could possibly be.

CHAPTER THE SIXTH.

MARRIED FOR MONEY.

WHEREUNTO is money good?
Who has it not wants hardihood,
Who has it has much trouble and care,
Who once has had it has despair.

I.

"I AM not surprised, and there is one comfort, Dumpling—you are not likely to break your heart over it;" was Mrs. Sara Grandage's reply when she heard from Rachel Withers' own lips that her engagement to Mr. Gillsland was at an end; then she bestowed on her one of her rare kisses, and bade her never mind! As if she did—no, she was very, very, *very* glad it was over; she felt nothing so strongly just then as a sense of relief at her deliverance. When the quarrel was new, indignation bore her up; then came a reaction of doubt lest she had done wrong in her haste; and finally ensued the calm satisfaction of having freed herself and him from a yoke which to wear would have been a life-long misery to both.

"You don't look the disappointed woman either, Dumpling, that is another blessing," went on her queer consoler. "Your cheeks will soon be apple-red and round again, which

is more than they have been for these two months past. Now, child, give way; let yourself go, and help me to pull him to pieces. You can see him with the eyes of the flesh now he has rubbed the glamor off, and isn't he provocative of sarcasm? Don't look so demure, I know you are feeling downright wicked." Perhaps she was, but she refrained herself; it would have been very unhandsome behavior—and possibly even yet a little against the grain—to chime in with her godmamma's mocking tone.

"He will marry Miss Briggs before the year is out, and won't he have a treat in his wife?" Bittersweet went on, derisively. "O lucky Miss Briggs! O blessed Mr. Gillsland! Don't be mortified, Dumpling, but I saw your charms grew pale in the curate's eyes the moment she appeared in her coach of fortune. You have shown a prompt and generous magnanimity in giving him up that all your friends admire; but tell me truly, are you not jealous?"

"Jealous—as if one *could* be *jealous* of one's grandmother!" exclaimed Rachel with sovereign contempt.

No, Rachel Withers was a sober little woman, not liable to the commotion of violent passions. Perhaps it was not in her nature to be acutely jealous of any body or any thing; those anguishes she had read of in romances found no echo of affinity within her gentle bosom. A silent, long pain, a deep, secret mortification she could exhaust in all their bitterness, but she was not the person to protest that all life was wasted, or to worry her neighbors because the love on which she had set her heart had come to such a ridiculous end. On the contrary, she became more assiduous than ever in her visits amongst the poor, and never relaxed for a single day her attendance at the school. Some persons may argue from this sensible conduct that she never really loved Mr. Gillsland at all; if she did not she fancied she did; and it comes to precisely the same thing in the end, when there is no opportunity given to prove it.

Now though he had used her ill, she did not even yet think *very* ill of him; and all her godmamma's sarcastic predictions did not make her believe that he would do so conspicuously foolish and mercenary a deed as a marriage with Miss Briggs would be. Miss Briggs was, without metaphor, old enough to be his mother. Her temper was bad, her manners were disagreeable, and her person was not only unattractive, but obtrusively ugly; good folks say we should not call any of God's creatures ugly, but she *was* ugly with affectation, pretension, and ill-nature. Rachel knew the curate was afraid of being poor—which is a very different thing from coveting great wealth; but she refused as long as facts would allow to credit that he could fathom that abyss of absurdity and greed into which a man plunges when he sells himself to a woman made of money, and of nothing but money.

Events, however, were too strong for her faith. October was not out before an engagement between the handsome curate and the fortunate heiress was announced; and November was not out before they had ratified it in Brafferton Church in the presence of a large

and critical congregation. It was done. Rachel could not speak a word for him any more. She could have forgiven him any thing but flying to the feet of Miss Briggs! if he had won the prettiest girl in the dale, she would have forgiven them both; but she could not forgive him his cowardly meanness that had earned him her contempt. She was made ashamed that she had ever loved him, and it was a long while before she could be in charity with herself again for having done it.

Mrs. Sara Grandage, the irreclaimable, curious old gossip, actually went to the wedding, and she told Rachel afterward that the bride was got up to such a degree of perfection that through her rich veil nobody would have guessed her at more than thirty.

"Nay," said Rachel, shaking her head with a doubtful smile, "no milliner could abolish her ancient gait!"

"But she was padded and puffed and bustled off into an elegant symmetry," continued Bittersweet, spreading her own skirts abroad in airy demonstration of flowing bridal raiment.

"Leanness is much more manageable in the hands of an *artiste* than over-redundancy of flesh, and I assure you, Dumpling—and you need not look as if you did not believe me—that all the church admired her *extremely*. She was a miracle of success: she was got up quite regardless of expense: white satin, lace flounces, and scarf, wreath of orange-blossoms and roses, and a sweeping veil that covered her all over. She tottered a little in walking up to the altar, but that was only a proper display of nervousness, which interested us all immensely, and enhanced her maidenly charms."

Here John Withers, who was present while Mrs. Sara Grandage was giving his sister this florid account, declared that if they were going to quiz so abominably he should leave them to themselves; which he did accordingly, and as soon as he was out of hearing, Bittersweet began to say, "Now, Dumpling, I am sure you are dying to know how *he* looked, but I will not tell you until you ask me the question formally."

"Well, then," said the quiet young woman, "how did Mr. Gilsland bear himself through the crisis of his fate?"

"That was very coolly put; Dumpling, I don't think you have an atom of heart! Well, my dear, he looked very nice and as natty as a dandy parson could. I can not tell you what he wore, but his clothes were an admirable fit, and his hair was in the glossiest curl; his face was rather blanched, it is true, but I dare say that twice or thrice during the ceremony it flashed across his mind how awfully he was committing himself. I declare it was almost as tragical as the sacrifice of Iphigenia done into a modern version! There was plenty of company, and what the congratulations lacked in sense I hope they made up in sound. She wept, but did not faint. Now, Curiosity, is there any thing more you would like to hear?"

Of course, Curiosity would like to hear every thing—all about the bride-visits, which were just over too. To this, Bittersweet pretended to demur. She did not make her call on either of the appointed state-days, but took the happy couple by surprise in the sweet confidence of private life, as she phrased it; and she did not

think it was quite fair to betray the secrets of families. But her scruples soon vanished before the irresistible enjoyment of telling a funny story.

"You know, Dumpling, how hard it is to teach an old dog new tricks," began she, sinking her voice, "and you may suppose that after all her years of pinching it would be hard to teach Betsy Briggs a wise liberality. I found her sitting in her bleak dining-room, furbishing up an old bonnet for dark days, while the wretched curate was reading aloud to her a missionary report—she was always *goody*, you know. And I assure you he looks already within an ace of hanging himself." Rachel hoped not, and reminded Bittersweet that she had a trick of seeing things sometimes less as they were than as she would like them to be. "I expected you would contradict me, and, perhaps, defend *him*," retorted the godmamma, and then she went on with her story.

"They told me about their tour, during which the frightful extravagance of the hotel bills quite spoiled the bride's pleasure. 'But Mr. Gilsland will do every thing so lavishly,' she explained, shaking her head at him with fond reproach. Then they discussed the comparative cost of living in the north or the south, and while he was decidedly in favor of London, she said, despotically, (and I wish you could have heard her say it, Dumpling!) 'No, Alfred, dear, we must keep the curacy until we have had time to look round for something else. It would be frivolous to throw away a hundred and fifty pounds a year—quite a competence, *quite* a competence if we had *nothing* else!' We were discussing this topic from various points of view when there came a single premonitory knock at the door, followed immediately by the entrance of the cook carrying a pasteboard, whereon were two pie-dishes full of sliced apples. With sulky stolidity, the woman said she had come according to orders to have the sugar put amongst the fruit. But I am much mistaken if the twinkle in her dull eyes did not betray a deep-laid kitchen plot for the exposure and mortification of *missis*. Mrs. Gilsland carried off the incident with a laugh and a domestic truism, but the miserable curate grew scarlet, and when she said to him, 'Alfred, dear, *will* you do it? the sugar is in the sideboard,' the scene was killing. She has him in good order already, for he rose, and produced the sugar, and sprinkled it sparsely over the fruit, while she all the time curbed his extravagance by crying, in a gradually ascending minor scale, 'Enough, enough, enough, my dear, I say, *enough*!' That is what a man comes to who marries for money—his rich wife makes him put sugar into apple-pies. This pleasing addition to his duties appears to be all he has gained yet from his far-sight speculation. You are avenged already, Dumpling, if that is any satisfaction to you!"

"I can not say it is," murmured Rachel, and there were positively tears standing in her foolish eyes.

"You silly little goose!" cried her godmamma; "why don't you rejoice in his humiliation? Any sensible woman would. And to think in what comfort you would have lapped his soul! how you would have petted him, and cosseted

him, and slaved after his every whim and fancy! I hope he likes his exchange, that is all—I should not."

At the cheerful Christmas season Mrs. Sara Grandage always made as many musters of her friends as she could, and in pursuance of her annual custom, she invited John Withers and his sister to dine with her on New Year's day. Rachel did not ask the precise question, and therefore there was no need for a precise answer, but it was both implied and understood that Mr. and Mrs. Gilsland were not invited for the same evening. Rachel therefore went in peace and serenity, looking very nice in white muslin with a sprig of holly in her bright brown hair; but as she was engaged in conversation with Mrs. Anderside, the two last guests, for whom dinner waited, were ushered into the drawing-room, and behold they were the curate and his charming wife! Bittersweet's malicious enjoyment of her trick was beyond description; but the party was large, and happily for Rachel she never came near enough to Mr. Gilsland to make recognition necessary. She had not seen him since that memorable day when they quarreled and parted.

Mrs. Gilsland was in full bridal splendor all but the veil, her poor old arms and withered neck contrasting sweetly with her shining white satin drapery; it was a cold night, and she looked miserably pinched, but she stoically refused to be made comfortable with a shawl of Bittersweet's, and wore her bride's airs and graces with a dignity that was most comically impressive. Her husband seemed to shrink a good deal out of sight—liking his situation perhaps as little as Rachel did hers—and somebody made the remark afterward that he was smaller than he used to be. He had lost his confident manner, and his assurance that he was pleasing somebody—was thoroughly ill at ease, in fact.

It was a very flat evening to several of the company, and John and Rachel both expressed themselves glad when the party broke up; but the sprightly little hostess declared it went off capitally, and to her no doubt it did; for she always found her sweetest amusement in the cross-purposes of her friends and acquaintance.

II.

Rachel Withers did not see Mr. Gilsland again until one afternoon in the spring when she had gone out with John for a walk on the moors. They came suddenly upon him at a turn in the path where avoidance was impossible, and they all made a stand, and spoke like common acquaintance. Rachel was looking as fresh as a rose, and the meeting did not lower her color—perhaps it was that caused Mr. Gilsland to say it must be more healthy living high up in the dale than down at Brafferton.

"We hope to leave the place before winter comes round again; for it does not suit my wife at all," he added.

John regretted to hear she was not well.

"She is always ailing, always ailing; but I hope she will be better when I get her away into the south," responded the curate, and lifting his hat to Rachel with a little of his old manner, went off nervously swinging his stick.

"After all," said John Withers, "one can not

help feeling some pity for a man who has taken himself in so grievously as poor Gilsland!"

No, Rachel could never think of him now without being divided between laughing and crying. She actually wished he were more in the way of getting some of the good for which he had bargained. He looked literally shabby and poor when they met on the moor, and his dress was by no means the most remarkable falling off in his appearance. Instead of bettering his condition by a rich marriage he had devoted himself to a slow, lingering, miserable martyrdom. He could not have much abstract pleasure in reflecting that his wife's income verged on three thousand a year when in their present luxurious establishment they could barely expend three hundred. They had taken a half-furnished house that had stood long unoccupied, and its wants were excused on the plea of its being only a temporary residence; an inferior cook and a very aged housemaid formed the domestic staff, and the horse that was to lighten the poor curate's labors had not been found yet. The only indulgence Mrs. Gilsland allowed herself was an extravagance of physic—one that her husband could hardly be anxious to share with her.

Mrs. Sara Grandage delighted in giving an imitation of her airs of invalidism.

"There she lies on her sofa all day with her face made up into the most *mevelty* look, while that wretched curate waits hand and foot on her caprices," said the vivacious old lady. "It would touch the heart of a stone, Dumpling, to see how thoroughly dejected, crushed and effaced he is in his wife's house. Their marriage settlements left him quite dependent on her mercy and charity, and precious little of either does she exercise in his behoof. She is so odiously stingy and oppressive that if I were in his shoes I would try a little bullying."

Even through the magnifying glasses of gossip and scandal it was easy to see a long vista of domestic misery in that ill-assorted household. They disagreed in public as well as in private, and she invariably got the last word. Mr. Gilsland had tried to deal plausibly with his wife, and while she had the power of the purse he was no match for her at all. Bittersweet delighted to tell Rachel that Mrs. Gilsland always referred to her as "*that girl*," and said she should never wish to see her again within her doors; as if Rachel were anxious to storm her castle of harmony! The reason alleged was Rachel's satirical spirit, but poor body, if she had shut out all who made fun of her, she would have had to shut out every soul of her acquaintance!

There was little present likelihood of their leaving Brafferton, though Mr. Anderside would gladly have been rid of his unpopular curate. Whether it was that Mrs. Gilsland really felt too ill for exertion, or whether it was that she preferred established friends to new ones, it is hard to say, but at all events she was exceedingly reluctant to change her quarters. Bittersweet declared she was as strong now as in her Betsy Briggs' days, and every body knew that Betsy Briggs was the toughest woman in the parish. She made nothing of walking in and out to Prior's Bank three or four times a week. But now, when she visited her friends, she hired the

chaise from the inn, and went in frouzy state, which lavishness of expense convinced Rachel that her ailments were not all fancy, as some folks wickedly delighted to say.

"Who would lie day after day on a sofa in a dull room pretending to be ill?" said she, deprecating her godmamma's sarcasms. "For my part I would rather dig, or delve, or follow the plow, or break stones on the high road than act such a tedious play for the amusement of the gossips!"

"You are a woman of sense, Dumpling, and Betsy Briggs always was, and always will be, a fantastic fool!" retorted Bittersweet; and Rachel was fain to drop her useless defense.

But a time of reverses was at hand; the heiress had enjoyed barely a year of golden prosperity when fortune decreed that she must return to poverty's hodden gray, carrying the most wretched of men and curates down with her in her humiliating descent.

"Swift retribution for a man who married for money," said one.

"Mrs. Gilsland will have to find the use of Betsy Briggs' feet again," said another.

Nobody had a word of sympathy at their service or any feeling of pity. Vague rumors flew about the dale for a few days, and then the whole story came out.

It appeared that when Mrs. Gilsland's eccentric cousin Dawson died, and her papers came to be looked over for the will, the document discovered, though in all respects regular, was of very old date, and that her man of business openly stated the fact of his having drawn up another which had been duly executed in the presence of his head clerk and himself only two years before. This instrument was not forthcoming, however, when wanted; suspicions arose that the testatrix had destroyed it in the design of making a new one; and this her lawyer said she had twice consulted him upon, without being able to decide as to its provisions; he was daily expecting her final instructions when she was taken ill, grew rapidly worse and died. Her confidential servant also stated that during the last night of her life she appeared much distressed in her mind, but that she got ease when she had sent a message to Mr. Saunderson, her lawyer.

"If I am fit to see Saunderson to-morrow I will," were her words; "but if not, tell him that perhaps things could not be better settled than they are; and the will he made is in the cabinet that my cousin John is to have."

Before morning the old lady was gone; and the recent will not being found where she said, that by which Mrs. Gilsland became rich and the two nephews were left quite unprovided for, was held to be her true testament, and acted on accordingly.

Thus far the tale flowed without mystery; but now it went that the missing will had actually turned up in the identical cabinet where Mrs. Dawson told her maid it would be found. The cousin John to whom, as a family relic, it was bequeathed, conveyed it to his house; and his wife declining to admit it as too ancient and cumbersome amongst the modern furniture of her best rooms, it ultimately found a refuge in their boys' tool-shed, where it served conveniently as a museum of curiosities. A little while ago

one of the tiny drawers in which birds'-eggs were ranged in wool got fast, and the eldest boy, in prizing it open, broke off a splinter of wood, in the cavity beyond which he espied something "glittering like gold." Immediately the young carpenters went to work, and in a few minutes they had discovered three narrow slides, constructed in each division between the center tier of drawers. They missed the secret of the spring, but found that a piece of wood, not much stronger than veneer, and folding upward on a concealed hinge, was what had hidden the slides or trays before. In one of these were some old-fashioned trinkets of no great value, in the second was a miniature of Mr. Dawson, his watch and his spectacles, and in the third was the missing will, and a paper of memoranda which purported to be part of the draft for that new will about which she had consulted her lawyer.

This will Mr. Saunderson declared to be the one he had drawn up. In it the name of Miss Briggs did not occur at all, but amongst the memoranda there was a sentence to the effect that Betsy Briggs must have something—three hundred pounds would be enough. Further the story ran that a compromise had been offered to the present possessors of the property and by them indignantly rejected. Mr. Gilsland was said to have pronounced the recently discovered will an impudent forgery, and to have sworn to fight out the battle to the last gasp. But every one thought the refusal of terms the height of folly, and decided their cause as lost before it was opened. The will had been submitted to competent authorities, the lawyer who made it took oath it was genuine, the opinion of counsel had been heard on both sides and it was against the Gilslands. Popularly speaking, they had not a leg to stand on.

It was a most disastrous downfall! The way in which they had used Mrs. Dawson's nephews was not to their credit; they had sent them to a cheap commercial school, though until their aunt's death they had been brought up as gentlemen, and destined to the church and the army. Common decency forbade that they should be turned altogether adrift on the world, but for any sense of kinship that Mrs. Gilsland had testified, they might have starved or gone to the poor-house. She had not borne her prosperity with any grace, and when adversity came she did not bear it with any resignation. As for the curate, he was like some desperate animal caught in a trap, and running aimlessly to and fro in his agony to escape, when escape there was none.

"Don't tell me," said Rachel Withers, shutting her eyes with an expression of pain when her godmamma insisted on giving her a lively description of his sufferings; "don't tell me—I can not bear to hear it! I think he had quite got his deserts before, without losing the money for which he married his odious wife!"

But you see Rachel would have pitied any thing fallen into calamity; it was the way with her. How much soever she might have disliked them in their good-luck, when trouble came, her own wrongs and their disagreeableness she could remember no more. "Poor souls!" sighed she, "what hard lines theirs will be now for both their lives to come!"

One afternoon she walked over to Prior's Bank, and on arriving there found the old Brafferton chaise standing at the gate; and suspecting who was with her godmamma, instead of at once going in, she took a turn round the beautiful wild-flower walk by the river, intending to keep out of the way until the visitor was gone; but being seen from the window, a messenger was sent to call her to the drawing-room at once.

On entering she found there Bittersweet looking her most ireful and indignant, while Mrs. Gilsland sat in tears, fretting her glove and humbling herself in broken apologies. Rachel hated to see any body undergoing mortification and abasement, and in the impulse of the moment, threw more warmth into her greeting of the poor soul than perhaps could appear to her genuine; for though she took the outstretched hand, and made some sort of response she suspected in her bitter heart that Rachel rejoiced in her miseries. She only remained a few minutes longer, and as soon as she was gone, Mrs. Sara Grandage broke out in undissembled wrath.

"You will never guess, Dumpling, what that woman has been here begging me to do! She wants me to back them with money in this most unjust and abominable suit. 'No, Betty Gilsland,' said I, 'I will not give you one farthing for any such purpose. I will help you to get away from Brafferton, but that is all the help you need look for from me.' They can not induce any respectable attorney to undertake their cause, and how is it likely they should? It is as clear as the day that they have no right to Mrs. Dawson's money, and every hour longer they hold it they are robbing those boys. I always thought until lately that Mr. Gilsland had a peculiarly shrewd eye to the main chance, but I am convinced now that he is as short-sighted as all over-clever people are. It is impossible he can retain the property, and yet he is bent on giving the rightful owners as much trouble as he can. He knows perfectly well the will is no forgery—*she*, the weak fool, with her own lips admitted *that*, and afterward had the audacity to entreat me to support them. No, I told her, I had not lived in honor and honesty for sixty years to turn fellow-swindler in my old age! I was too angry to spare her, I assure you, Dumpling."

Clearly so. When Bittersweet was angry she did not spare any body.

Of course, every sagacious person foresaw where this miserable affair must eventually end. When the Gilslands had recovered from their first shock of dismay, horror, and rage, they came to their senses, accepted the terms offered by Mrs. Dawson's nephews and gave up the property. Mrs. Gilsland received the three hundred pounds which her cousin had intended her to have, they left Brafferton, and retired somewhere into a doleful obscurity.

But such a man as Mr. Gilsland never retires beyond the reach of temptation; and he had put himself so entirely out of the ordinary grooves of prosperity that it was quite sure to find him sooner or later, and to drag him deeper and deeper into the sloughs of despond.

CHAPTER THE SEVENTH.

SIR LAURENCE WARLEIGH.

La philosophie triomphe aisément des maux passés et des maux à venir; mais les maux présents triomphent d'elle.—ROCHEFOUCAULD.

I.

It was now full six months since Sir William Warleigh died, and since, to the reprobation of the whole neighborhood, Sir Laurence had refused to appear at his father's funeral. He was beginning to drop out of people's thoughts and conversation now. At first the country hoped and expected that he would emerge from his seclusion and assume his due position as master of Penslaven and Whinstane; but in this they were disappointed. He never left Hurdledale for a single day. They had therefore ceased to wonder over his preference for a hermit-life, and had given up all hope of seeing the Warleighs take their rightful place in society during the present baronet's reign. It was a pity and much to be regretted, many persons said, that Oliver was not the elder brother; he was sensible of what rank and wealth owe to the world, and would have regilded the tarnished name of Warleigh splendidly. Lady Georgiana was very strongly of that opinion. By dint of constant harping on the theme, she almost succeeded at last in convincing herself that her husband was an injured person, defrauded of his birthright, and suffering the evils of poverty that a half-crazy impostor might let ancestral halls become howling wildernesses, and accumulate untold sums of rents in the hands of his provincial bankers.

Mr. Bond, the steward, was an honest, conscientious man, or he would have found his office under Sir Laurence one of vast temptation and opportunity; for his master committed all to his charge, and found apparently neither interest nor enjoyment in his possessions. He had made no change whatever in his manner of living, which was as rough and plain as that of a simple yeoman farmer. From time to time various rumors had flown abroad respecting his ways and habits, all more or less derogatory to his credit, and mortifying to those who were personally interested in his honor. He was said to frequent low company and to drink deep, but both these scandals were without foundation. He was abstemious in Helena's lifetime, and since her death, a more unsociable man, whether with equals or inferiors, could not have been found throughout the length and breadth of the dales.

Gossip said her say, and probably Sir Laurence heard never a word of it. With his dogs and his gun, his horse and his boat on the tarn, his pipe, his newspaper and his books, he had made himself quite independent of the world with which he had quarreled. So rarely had he seen his child that Mistress Dobie was ready to lay a wager any day that he would not know it if he met it in an unaccustomed place; many and many a time had Mary Wray and Lucy pranked it out in its best, and waylaid him in the hope that he would notice it; but he never did, and his manners were so surly and alarming to the women that they agreed at last it was safest to keep it altogether out of his sight. Through the intervention of Mrs. Damer War-

leigh a sort of reconciliation had been established between him and his sisters, but Oliver he had peremptorily refused to see; though for the present he permitted him to continue at the Tower. With his sisters there and Lady Foulis, it was impossible immediately to disband the household; but it was understood that at the end of the year's mourning for their father a change must be made. Lady Georgiana was in the practice of declaring that *they* must then go and live somewhere abroad for *economy's* sake; she might more truly have said for *pleasure's* sake; for they would really be able to flourish with great bravery on the fine spoils they had contrived to glean during the later months of Sir William's lifetime. Laurence not being there to interfere or remonstrate, all the finest timber on both estates had been ruthlessly swept down and turned into money to satisfy Oliver's rapacity.

One day about the time of falling leaves, Mrs. Damer Warleigh, after a visit to the Hurtlemere House, called on her way home at Prior's Bank, where Rachel Withers happened to be spending the afternoon with her godmamma. The excellent old lady fell immediately to talking of Sir Laurence, and said she was afraid he would turn out nothing but a disappointment to her and the Squire. She could not understand his persistence in remaining in Hurtledeale when the luxuries and glories of Penslaven and Whinstane were at his disposal, and his conduct at the time of his father's death she freely characterized as monstrous and unnatural. There are some people who can not change their mood as easily as their gloves, and Sir Laurence was one of them.

"He allowed me to overwhelm him with reproaches and good counsels without uttering a word in his own defense," said the visitor. "There *he* sat and there *I* sat—he smoking like a kiln, I lecturing until for lack of breath I could lecture no longer. It is very provoking to see him so given up to regret and indolence as he is, and nothing will stir him out of them seemingly. The baby is a capital little creature, but not a bit like Helena, and he does not seem to care a straw for it, though he will not intrust it to his sisters. By the by, Rachel, how is John?"

This question sprang palpably out of some thought of Katherine, and Rachel answered that he was very well, on which Mrs. Damer said, "I should like him to come over with you to Bristowe for a few days next week if you can spare the time; Katie and Grace are both coming, and now that all my own girls are married and gone, the place is dull for young folks unless we can gather several together at once." Rachel accepted the invitation on her own responsibility; she was sure John both could and would make leisure for that visit, though for most people he was ever ready with an excuse. And Rachel herself would be very glad to see her friends again.

II.

Bristowe was a pleasant house to stay at, and two of its guests, at least, vastly enjoyed its social opportunities. Mrs. Damer Warleigh was not properly a maneuverer, but John Withers and Katherine had not been there two days before she had brought about a thorough understanding between them. It was an engagement at last. She was twenty-six and would not need

to ask any body's consent to being happy in her own way and according to her own choice, even had there been any likelihood of opposition from her brothers, which there was not. Sir Laurence declined to interest himself in his sisters' affairs altogether, and several times since their father's death Lady Georgiana had proclaimed her opinion that his daughters would be better off settled in homes of their own, though ever so humble, than left to themselves at Whinstane Tower when she and Oliver deserted it. There could be no two views on the subject. Both the Squire and Mrs. Damer Warleigh professed themselves gratified by Katherine's choice, and to all appearance John and she would be a very evenly-yoked couple. She was looking remarkably handsome at Bristowe, and though to Rachel's mind she was neither so tender nor so attractive as Grace, she was much better suited to John.

Whatever virtue Rachel lacked, she did not lack patience in listening to lovers' rhapsodies, and they all seemed with one consent to have elected her Old Woman to hearken to their respective experiences. She was astonished how naturally she fell into the character. Could she be on the verge of finding her vocation in the world? Was she really going to be that somebody who, having no more particular rejoicings or grievances of her own, was always to be called on to sympathize in those of other people? It began to look rather like it. Bittersweet used once to provoke her by saying that she was cut out for an old maid, but she had come to think so herself now; and though she would not be one-and-twenty until December she had quite made up her mind that the best part of her life and adventures was over, and she bore the belief very patiently. She was always a quiet young woman.

Author Hill was at this time in Syria, and his correspondence with Grace Warleigh had never been renewed. She was looking sadly pined and disconsolate at Bristowe, and spoke in a plaintive voice that had tears in it perpetually. One afternoon, wandering with Rachel through the wood-walks, they saw John and Katherine a little way in advance, but so completely absorbed in each other that they heard no footsteps behind them. The friends turned off, therefore, into the fields, Grace saying, "Do not let us disturb them; I am ashamed to show my face where happy people are," and her sickly smile and sigh contrasted painfully with what she knew to be the contented state of the inobservant lovers.

Presently, and of her own accord, she began to speak of Author Hill, and to tell Rachel how roughly Oliver had behaved to her, and in what a peremptory, assuming strain he had written to Author to forbid their correspondence.

"He never wrote to me after," she went on. "I almost expected that he would set Oliver at naught, but on some points he is very sensitive. I was debarred from going to the rectory, so that I had no chance of hearing of him or of sending any word through his mother. I believe it is all over between us forever, and I was very much attached to him. How do women console themselves for these separations? I hardly knew how Arthur was woven into all my daily thoughts and future hopes until Oliver sundered us. It is not possible that I should

ever cease to love him, ever forget him,"—and so she talked on, pitying herself, and foreseeing no mitigation in the void of her dull life, until all at once she remembered that Rachel, too, had had what is called a *disappointment*, when she manifested some curiosity to know how she had got over it.

Rachel told her more easily than any one would imagine, or than she could have imagined herself beforehand.

"Ah, *you* are so sensible!" said Grace, with a faint inflection of disapproval in her tone.

"It was not a romantic episode to fret over. I could not indulge myself in a sentimental sorrow for the man who married Miss Briggs," replied Rachel, a little decidedly.

"But did you never feel quite downcast and hopeless—as if there were nothing left in the world worth living for?" asked her companion, her countenance expressing that to be quite her own state of mind.

"To speak strict truth, I never did," was the answer. "I was rather lost and vacant at first, and the time hung long on my hands—as time will when we have no central rallying point for our leisure thoughts—but I was not mortally wounded. I tried to get away from my feelings, and God and my work helped me. I never gave up. Then John was so unfeignedly thankful, and godmamma Grandage did nothing but congratulate me; and by and by I knew I had had what I ought to consider a lucky escape."

"I don't think I could ever have regarded it in that light," murmured Grace.

"Perhaps not: we are differently constituted. I turn every thing bright side out, and accept cheerfully what I can not evade. Perhaps if all had gone smoothly, and I had married Mr. Gilsland, he might never have developed the traits he has done; but if he had, I should have been miserable as his wife. He is timorous of ill-fortune, and incapable of withstanding the temptations of poverty and a humble position. Straightforward honesty and plain dealing are not in him. He was paving his way to Miss Briggs' golden graces before our engagement ceased, as his prompt marriage within three months after betrayed. I should prefer good temper and common-sense in domestic life before many finer-sounding virtues, and it is in those two qualities that Mr. Gilsland has shown himself most of all deficient. Besides, like many women, I abhor meanness and greed far worse than many more obtrusive vices; and I am really sorry that I have wasted the freshest of my affections on an unworthy object. It is just my best *lost*. I esteem you much happier in your love than myself."

"I think so, too. Nothing would comfort me for the baseness and treachery of any one to whom I had attached myself."

"Contempt is a swift chiller of affection. So long as one can go on believing in a man one can go on loving him through the most adverse circumstances; but once creep in scorn and it is all over!"

"I have the deepest, sincerest respect for Arthur Hill: I trust and pray it may never change!" sighed Grace; but this time the sigh was lighter, for she found consolation in comparing her own trial with her companion's—hers that *might* end in ultimate happiness, while Rachel's nothing could change.

To make the sense of relief permanent, Rachel, who discerned her thoughts pretty correctly, offered a few pleasant predictions which were quite as likely as not to come true. Christmas would certainly see Arthur Hill home again, and when he found how his friend had prospered with Katherine, he might take heart to renew his suit to her sister. Grace smiled and said Rachel was very kind; and the quiet little woman felt that she had done somebody good.

III.

The following morning, Mrs. Damer Warleigh, Katherine, and Rachel were seated in a pretty room opening into the conservatory, all busy with idle-work and chat, when they saw Sir Laurence Warleigh crossing the lawn toward the house, in company with the Squire and John Withers; his riding-whip in his hand and his country-made clothes white with the dust of the roads. Katherine sprang up, her face radiant with joyful surprise, and called Grace from the library adjoining, for her first thought was that her brother knew of their being at Bristowe, and had come over on purpose to see them.

But such was not the case. He had only met them once before since Helena's death, and he met them now with a quite natural reserve and coldness—a more hopeless temper out of which to educe good family-feeling than anger, howsoever vehement. Grace looked even more white and ill than usual, and Katherine's momentary exuberance fell as quickly as it had risen. They exchanged a few sentences, but only on general subjects, and parted again with the distant courtesy, and, on one side at least, with the indifference of strangers. They were strangers in heart. Mrs. Damer Warleigh was grieved, but the sisters expressed nothing of their feelings, though it was impossible not to perceive how their brother's negligence wounded and disappointed them.

John Withers had some conversation with him which may be described as having had no results. Sir Laurence said Katherine was independent of him, and would, of course, please herself; quite ignoring the circumstance that when she was married their homes would be almost within sight of each other. But John took his churlishness very philosophically: it was enough for him that he had neither opposition nor delay to expect from the head of the family.

Oliver and his Lady Georgiana were so well satisfied with the engagement, that the reply they sent in acknowledgment of the letter that announced it, was accompanied by an invitation to Whinstane Tower; which, in the cultivation of their soon-to-be family relations, both John and his sister accepted. They went thither at the end of October, when the few days of the latter summer were reigning on the hills and in the woods, and thus the place looked less desolate than as Rachel once saw it before in the wintery Christmas weather.

The Oliver Warleighs showed themselves as gracious toward their guests as it became them to do toward accepted future connections, but from the first Rachel could not bring herself to like Lady Georgiana. She was a tall woman, stiff rather than stately, though well made, and

her face was exceedingly white—clay-white, and deeply pitted with the small-pox. Her eyes were pale yellowish gray, and the brows and lashes so light as to be scarcely perceptible at a distance; her hair was a dull towy flaxen, dressed in the most ornate style its natural frizziness would admit of,—altogether an exceedingly plain woman with a mean type of face and commonplace features. The children, fortunately for them, took after their father rather than their mother; and Mortimer, the eldest boy, was extremely pretty. Rachel made quite a pet of him, but Katherine and Grace had such a dislike to their sister-in-law that they could hardly help carrying a little of it on to her children's account.

Lady Georgiana was a remarkable disciplinarian—even her ten months' old baby felt her power and obeyed it. One day she offered the tiny victim to Rachel's arms, but not liking the face of a stranger, it naturally set up a small pipe of a cry, when Lady Georgiana immediately withdrew with it to the next room; after a few minutes' absence she returned, the atom sitting up on her arm with its feathers composed, and again she offered it to Rachel's embrace, but again baby gave way to an irrepressible wail. Rachel felt quite ashamed of herself, and apologized, saying she was afraid there was something about her he did not like; to which Lady Georgiana replied in her hard voice "O no! not at all, not at all; but my children are inclined to cry at the sight of strangers, and as it is a trick I particularly dislike, I endeavor to cure them of it at every opportunity;" and a second time she vanished behind the door. When she reappeared baby went to Rachel without a whimper, and was as good as gold. For a mother, Lady Georgiana was a wonderful woman, and did not err on the side of tenderness.

The first evening John Withers and his sister were at Whinstane, Mr. and Mrs. Hill came to dinner. The good old rector and his wife were very kind to Grace and told her Arthur was soon coming home. Her sad countenance cheered a little, but it was nothing to be compared to Katherine's jubilant brightness. Happiness was a new state of being to her, and she carried the lustre of it in her beautiful face. She was softer in manner too, and her very voice had another tone.

Whinstane was undeniably a pleasanter place to stay at now than it had been during that first memorable visit of Rachel Withers in Sir William Warleigh's time; but it was provoking both to her and to her brother to watch Oliver exercising his airs of mastership when they remembered who ought to be living and ruling there. His sisters did not seem to have power to say a word in furtherance of their own wishes; Lady Georgiana had her carriage, but they had no carriage, and now, no horses to ride. Sir William only left each of his daughters five thousand pounds at her own disposal, and three hundred a year for life, charged on the estate; not fortunes commensurate with his great wealth by any means; but Oliver had profited to the extent of their loss.

The first night when Rachel went to bed, she heard Lady Foulis, as usual, making the darkness mournful with the drone of her organ. It was not so sad at this time of year, when she

could set her window open to listen; and this she did, looking up at a sky where was no moon, but which was bright with innumerable stars. How was it that standing there, with the wind on her brow, and the sound in her ears, there came over her heart and her brain all that had passed between then and now? All the sun-bright hopes, and shadowy doubts, and dark realizations of the doubts—all the little love-passages, and vexed words, and mortified tears that had put her out of the pale of youth, and made of a glad some girl, a serious and grave-eyed woman. They came and went, and her face was wet again, and the sob in her throat again; and she said her prayers and God comforted her; and the morrow came like any other day, and nobody knew or cared that she had seen ghosts last night. She was a reticent little woman, and kept her troubled visitants from the other world of memory to herself.

Lady Foulis sent for her once during her stay at Whinstane, and from certain allusions she made, Rachel understood that she knew of the disappointments that had befallen her. There was no special reference made to them, however, and the weird old lady seemed better pleased to prattle on the theme of Katherine's going to be married. "And Grace too, *Grace too*," she added, with an emphatic gesture of her head. She had become somewhat hard of hearing, but she still fingered her organ as incessantly as ever. If we think of it what a consolation it must have been to her during her half-century of captivity! Music would be the last passion, the last sense to forsake her.

When she was told by what name Sir Laurence's little daughter had been called, she testified extreme distress, wringing her withered hands and crying: "Oh unwise, unwise! There was never an Annis Warleigh lived to be good and happy yet. It was my name—it is under a curse, under a curse!"

Katherine, in speaking of this to Rachel, regretted that the name which was coupled with disaster and dishonor to their house whenever it had been borne by a daughter of it, should have fallen to Laurence's child. But Rachel, with the warning of Helena and the White Hands strong in her recollection, said that if these family traditions were not so mischievous they would be simply ridiculous. Impress an imaginative mind with the idea that it is born to sorrow, and the prophecy is very likely to work out its own fulfillment. Idle words often sink deeper than the speakers mean they should. If the first Annis Warleigh was faithless to her husband, a poisoner, a witch, and every thing else that is wicked, her descendants were surely not bound to take after her! Lady Foulis had undergone penance enough in her own person to wear out any curse.

Katherine heard her say her say, and then reiterated with unconvinced pertinacity:

"All the same, I wish she were not called Annis. She will be either very bad or very unlucky."

"Then," replied Rachel, "let us trust she may be only unlucky!"

IV.

Early in December Arthur Hill returned to England, and perhaps nobody was very greatly surprised when it was announced that two wed-

dings instead of one would take place at Whinstane in the course of the ensuing spring. Grace and he needed only to see each other to set their troubles straight, and a Christmas morning letter brought the good news to Hurtledeale Rectory, where no news could have been more welcome. Rachel was cordially glad for her friend, and to John Withers no brother-in-law could have been so acceptable as Arthur Hill.

Now and then the thought of how she should dispose of herself when her brother married had intruded itself very sadly on Rachel's rest, but she early made up her mind to one thing—she would not go on living at the rectory. Married folks were best left to themselves, and besides she had no fancy for taking a secondary place where she had been mistress. She liked to order and manage about a house, and if she were to remain, she should constantly be putting in her oar where she ought not. It was nonsense of John to talk about Katherine's wanting her to teach her household and parish ways; Katherine must learn for herself as she had done. Perhaps it would have grieved her never to have had the offer of a home with them made to her, but when they had done their affectionate duty, she began to think in earnest of doing her wise one. She was sure a way would be made clear by and by, and meanwhile she looked round her in patience and hope.

Let her lot in life be what it might, Rachel Withers would never be otherwise than what we call a happy woman. It is worth a fortune to have a cheerful temper and an easy adaptability of character. She could thrive in any soil, and it must have been a black cloud indeed through which her eyes could not discern any portion of the silver lining! The secret of it was that she could enjoy the present, and throw herself heartily into little passing pleasures; but she had no great enthusiasms, and one step at a time in life was enough for her. She was not given to daily self-anatomy as practiced by heroines, but she did her duty as far as she knew it, and became in process of time calmness and patience personified; precisely what her mother had been before her in her later years.

While Rachel was considering of her future lot, her godmamma Grandage was considering of it too; and after mature deliberation she made her the offer of a permanent home at Prior's Bank.

"While I live, live with me: when I am dead you will find yourself sufficiently provided for," said the old lady very kindly. "I want company, and I hate the idea of a hired companion; I was always in an agony lest Betsy Briggs should get hold of me, until she came into her fortune and Mr. Gilsland married her; but now I feel comparatively safe. It seems to me that you are thrown on the world, Dumpling, just at the right moment to be picked up and adopted by me; for I must have somebody soon, if I don't have you. Go home and talk to John about it."

So Rachel went home and talked to John about it. As far as she individually was concerned, she would rather go to Prior's Bank than not, she said. Bittersweet was fond of her, and they were as much used to each other's oddities and quiddities as if they had lived together for years. Old as Mrs. Sara Grandage

was her mind was serene, and her wits as bright as ever; while as for her habits, the only risk would be of their proving too active for her goddaughter. At Prior's Bank she should still be in the midst of friends, within reach of the schools and of some of her other work with which Katherine's coming to the rectory need not necessarily interfere.

John heard all and said little—he would not have liked to live with Bittersweet, if it were only for her untiring vivacity of speech, but he knew his sister's patience, and thought perhaps she might be able to bear it. She was of a conversational turn herself.

Rachel and her godmamma had the matter over several times again before any thing was finally decided, but as they were the principal persons concerned in the result, they determined at last to please themselves; and agreed that when John brought Katherine home to the rectory his sister should move to Prior's Bank.

In the prospect of her new home and its duties, Rachel could not help wishing 'that nature had endowed her with a warmer and more diffusive manner toward those she loved.' Whether it was the violent check her affections had received, or whether it was only her characteristic reserve developing itself, she could not tell, but certainly her cold shyness and formality were growing upon her. When it would have been appropriate to say something affectionate and cordial more often than not she was tongue-tied. She conscientiously warned Bittersweet of this, lest when they came to be always together, she should be disappointed; but her godmamma professed herself not exacting of displays of tenderness, and comforted her not a little by answering to her avowals, "You are not so much cold as quiet, Dumpling, and I know you will prove very satisfactory to me. Demonstrative people's ways are pretty and touching, but they may be a bore and grow fidgety in private life. One is safer with a calm disposition in the long run, and permanence always pleased me better than vehemence." The energetic old lady was, at all events, disposed to make the best of her household companion, and next after John, Rachel certainly loved her now better than any body else in the world.

In March the rectory had a thorough turn-out in preparation for the coming of its new mistress; and poor Rachel, with all her endeavors, could not keep away the little cloud of dullness which would creep over her now and then, as she went to and fro the house, directing and superintending the changes that had to be. And John was so cheerful!

"Well," said she, taking herself to task one day, when she had been flatter than usual, "well, if this goes on, I shall turn into a sour, cantankerous old thing, resentful and envious of other people's happiness, and that would be worse to bear than all! Going to Prior's Bank will be a sort of new beginning, of life to me—not so hopeful as the last, but I must begin it with a good heart. When life looks level and blank before one it is well to have won the belief that God knows best. In saddened moments a thought comes tempting me to fancy that I could have arranged my own lot more satisfactorily, but I am utterly resolved to feel and say that after all God *must* know best."

And Rachel's work went the better and her heart was the lighter for her Christian philosophy.

V.

The time flew very fast toward the end. One, two, three days, and Rachel Withers must say good-by to the dear old rectory as home, and go to make way for its new mistress. She had a sort of leave-taking at the school and of her poor folks, feeling all the while as if a good cry would have eased her heart, but the tears refused to flow. They said that they should miss her; and she would like them to miss her a little at first; though in time Katherine was sure to make up for her loss. She bade fair to become an excellent clergyman's wife.

Sir Laurence Warleigh declined to attend at the marriage of his sisters, and the ceremony took place with the utmost privacy in Penslaven Church; only Mrs. Damer Warleigh and the Squire being invited to be present.

The weddings over, John and Katherine set out for a month's tour in Scotland, and Arthur Hill and Grace departed to Devonshire, where he had been presented to a small living, beautifully situated on the coast. Rachel then went home to Prior's Bank, and very shortly afterward the Oliver Warleighs discharged their establishment, and retired to live in Paris; leaving Whinstane Tower to Lady Foulis and the owls.

Sir Laurence Warleigh still remained faithful to the old Hurltemere House.

PART SECOND.

SIR LAURENCE'S LITTLE WILDLING.

CHAPTER THE FIRST.

ANNIS AT HURLTEMERE.

THE sound of thy merry voice
Makes the old walls
Jubilant, and they rejoice
With the joy of thy young heart,
O'er the light of whose gladness
No shadows of sadness
From the somber background of memory start.
LONGFELLOW.

I.

THERE was nothing about little Annis to remind Sir Laurence Warleigh of the sweet wife he had lost when she was born. She had russet-brown elf locks, large, bluish-gray eyes like himself, and a sturdy, willful, fearless temper of her own as ever child was made with. She enjoyed her liberty unchecked and unthwarted, and was perhaps encouraged to be despotic and imperious more than was quite good for her, because her small tyrannies were an amusement to those who loved her. Nothing the womenfolk liked better than to see her drumming with tiny fist low down on the door of the room where Sir Laurence sat, and shouting to him to open and let her in.

There had been an important revolution transacted at the Hurltemere House soon after Annis began to toddle alone, which was a source of rejoicing to all concerned. One day, having evaded Lucy's watchfulness with that demure little spirit of mischief which was her strongest baby trait, she strayed down to the edge of the tarn, and there she was sitting in the sunshine amongst the reeds, when Sir Laurence happened to go thither to take out his boat. He picked her up, much as he might have picked up a terrier-pup, and Annis was as game.

She was used to see him from her nursery-window, and Lucy had taught her to call him Papa as she called a tree *tree*, and a horse *horse*; so when he lifted her to a level with his face, she gazed at him undaunted, lisped his name and poked out one of her wee fat hands to clutch his beard. Sir Laurence shook her; she chuckled, kicked, and crowded, and finally at his request, pouted two rosy buds of lips and

kissed him, until he ended by putting her into the boat and rowing across the tarn with her; to the inexpressible anguish of Lucy by whom her loss was discovered almost as soon as she disappeared. Sir Laurence kept her out with him until dusk, and a terrible weeping and wailing was going on round the borders of the tarn when he was seen coming home with the little gipsy in his arms, having left the boat on the further side of the water and walked back through the woods. Lucy with a loud cry dashed forward and snatched her away, sobbing with hysterical delight; for she had almost begun to think of the child as dead, and to picture to herself the drowned locks and dear baby face tangled amongst the bushes overhanging the water which might suddenly confront her and end her dreadful search.

Sir Laurence understood the case without Mistress Dobie's half-glad, half-angered explanations, and the same evening he put an end to Lucy's wretched anticipations of immediate dismissal for her negligence, by giving her a sovereign, and bidding her mind the child more carefully in future. Lucy in the fervor of her penitence and gratitude transferred the coin to the bag for the Catholic poor of Brafferton, and she could never for years after speak of Annis's "blessed preservation" without weeping like Niobe. Mary Wray, who had been some time returned to her husband's roof, but who loved the little creature as if she were bone of her bone and flesh of her flesh, talked of going back to the Hurltemere House to take charge of her foster-babe herself; but her master refused to spare her again, and instead she removed with him into the small farm near the Force, which Sir Laurence at this period granted them rent-free in acknowledgment of Mary's office to his daughter.

Thus out of an imminent danger had come a great good, and little Annis was no longer the only neglected thing in her father's house. From that day she was permitted to hang about his steps like any other doggie; he taught her to run on messages, to fetch and carry his boots, his slippers, and his big pot of tobacco, and to

lie down on the rug and fall asleep amongst the dogs when he wished her to be still. Annis soon learned to love him far better than her nurses, fond as she was of them; hers was a warm heart that would cling faithfully to any one who caressed her; and her otherwise neglected childhood was certainly not unhappy.

Lucy said she was a tom-boy, but she thought her a precious darling, and would have quarreled with any body who should have dared to find a fault in her miracle of perfection. It seemed never to occur to those who cared for and indulged her that it was in any way necessary to teach her the art of reading; and though from the lips of Mistress Dobie, who was a great adept at recitation, she had learned a number of quaint old ballads which Sir Laurence set her to lisp at his knee in her clipped provincial dialect, while he was smoking his pipes of winter evenings, she did not at four years old so much as know her letters. Lucy's own education was very imperfect, and did not compass the pronunciation of long words without spelling, which was probably the reason why her views were so very lax. She brought the child up just as she would have brought up a child of her own, and being wholly trusted by Sir Laurence, was rather jealous of any advice or interference from without. She was undoubtedly a well-principled young woman, and her constant affection cheered and warmed the motherless bairn; but kinsfolk and friends began to say that at four years old Sir Laurence Warleigh's daughter should have other companionship and tendance than that of an ignorant young Romanist nurse, how good and kind soever she might be. In some respects Annis was well done to, but in others there was much room for improvement. Winter and summer her clothing was rough and plain, and not always either whole or cleanly; for the little maiden ran as wild out of doors as any cottager's child could do. One day her Aunt Katherine going up to pay a rare visit at the Hurtlemere House, saw the merry wee gipsy, without hat and tanned berry-brown, perched astride of a broad-backed cart-horse which Mathew Dobie was leading down to water, and shouting at the utmost pitch of her sound young lungs such encouraging ejaculations to Tinker as she had picked up from the farmer's frequent use of them.

It was on this occasion that Katherine first essayed a mild remonstrance with Sir Laurence, but he appeared to think that there was time enough yet to get his little wildling—who was only a better sort of a pet dog to him—into training, and would not be prevailed on to subject her to any stricter discipline than that she now thrived under. A truly disheartening account of her appearance and manners was then sent to Grace, who thereupon joined in the appeal, even offering to take the child into her own charge; for she had none of her own. Katherine might have wished to assume the responsibility too, but her husband would not have permitted her to add to her cares, even had her brother been willing to let Annis go to her; and indeed, her hands were quite full enough with her own active, irrepressible boys—two in the house, neither of them yet steady on his pins, were anxiety and trouble enough for any reasonable woman.

By some means or other the rumor of changes affecting her foster-babe came round to Mary Wray's ears, and she esteemed it her bounden duty to go first to Katherine and afterward to Sir Laurence himself to inquire how much or how little truth there was in what she had heard. She also gave them the benefit of her opinion on what influences were likely to affect her darling's destiny for good or ill, and suggested that if Annis must needs go from home to be made a lady of, why should she not be sent to Oliver Warleigh's wife who was an experienced mother herself, and who must know what belonged to bairns, having three of her own?

This was how Lady Georgiana came first to be thought of as the most eligible guardian for Sir Laurence Warleigh's daughter. Her own children were patterns of proper behavior, and though no love subsisted between her and her sisters-in-law, they were both fain to agree that there was sense and soundness in Mary Wray's suggestion.

But however the rest of the family might cabal for the rescue of Annis from the ruinous neglect and indulgence in the midst of which she was flourishing as luxuriantly as an ill-weed could, Sir Laurence himself had not the smallest intention of parting with her; and this comfortable assurance he gave her foster-mother with his own lips.

"The bairn is but a bairn and can't be catching much that's amiss yet;" said Mary; but on the other hand it was very justly pleaded that refined habits are seed for early sowing, and that Annis ought soon to be transferred to the care of a gentlewoman if she was to grow up into a little gentlewoman herself. The manner of the change was the difficulty, and also how to bring Sir Laurence to consent to any change at all; but Katherine was convinced of the wisdom of it more effectually than ever, when she, on the occasion of another visit to the Hurtlemere House, heard Lucy instructing her niece in a Catholic child's prayers. Her Protestant feelings took the alarm, and she wrote forthwith to Lady Georgiana to sound her on the feasibility of Mary Wray's idea.

Three or four days after the dispatch of this letter, Oliver Warleigh arrived at the rectory, perhaps more to the surprise than the pleasure of its inhabitants, but his welcome was quite sufficiently cordial to induce him to remain. He and his wife had caught eagerly at the possible advantages which might accrue to them from having the care of Sir Laurence's child; and primed with all manner of plausible arguments in favor of the suggestion Katherine had made to them, he came over in hot haste to urge it on his brother in person.

II.

It was on a dull March afternoon that Oliver Warleigh first presented himself in his character of ambassador at the Hurtlemere House. Sir Laurence was not indoors, but Mistress Dobie with a rather frozen welcome ushered him into a room adjoining that which his brother habitually occupied, and bade him wait. One leaf of the folding-door which communicated with the next room stood ajar, and looking through it, Oliver perceived that Annis was there; and he remained for several minutes watching her attentively, and listening to her monotonous

chanting of one of those ancient ballads which were her only accomplishment.

Couched upon the hearth in the midst of a group of sleeping dogs sat the child, shaggy as any one of them, singing straight through the tragical song of "The Bonny Earl of Murray." At the close of the last verse, she laid her head down on the broad side of one of the great hounds, stretched her little arm up over its neck, and appeared to be composing herself for a nap; but the creaking of a board under Oliver Warleigh's stealthy foot, made her turn and look round. When she saw a stranger she rose on her knees, gazed straight at him and said quaintly, "Who are you? You are not of this house."

"I am your uncle Oliver, my little petkin," replied he, and held out his hand.

The propitiatory gesture was not responded to. Annis got on her feet and staid regarding him neither diffident nor afraid for some moments, as if she were considering his claims to her favor, and deciding on them as extremely trifling. "A bold little lass," thought he; but he made a second advance by asking if she would like to come and sit on his knee. "No," was the blunt response; and after watching the intruder suspiciously for another minute or so, she made a sudden rush past him and escaped out of the room. "A wild little lass," thought Oliver Warleigh again, and sat him down much disconcerted in his brother's chair.

Though it was scarcely more than midday the afternoon, the day was so overcast that already it was growing gloomy indoors; but he flung some logs out of the wood-basket upon the fire, and as the pine knots kindled and blazed up the dim twilight was suffused with a warm and pleasant glow which penetrated into the remoter parts of the large room. But the ruddy fire-shine only brought out into greater prominence its dreary, comfortless nakedness; on the paneled walls no picture, on the oaken floor no carpet, and the scant furniture of a rude and cumbersome antiquity. It was not the east room which was used when Helena was alive, but the long-abandoned dining-hall, which in old times re-echoed with mirth more loud than wise when Moor Murray entertained his boon companions after a hard day's sport. The aspect of Sir Laurence's daily abode for these four years past, revealed to Oliver Warleigh more of his brother's actual life than could have done the amplest spoken details. Its atmosphere was one of a thousand pipes; guns, dog-whips, fishing-tackle, and other kindred articles ornamented every corner and recess; while several slovenly heaps of books and magazines, strewn hither and thither upon the floor, were indicative of Annis's constructive skill in castle-building; other toys than these paper-bricks she had none.

As his eye took in each dull detail of this gloomy scene, Oliver Warleigh marveled more and more; he lost patience in thinking of Laurence. "Every pleasure of life within his reach, and not the spirit to enjoy any thing!" soliloquized he. "There was never a woman trod shoe-leather yet worthy of such sacrifices to her memory! And that gipsy-bred little monkey heiress to Penslaven and Whinstane — if I have any discernment concerning natural attraction and antipathy there will not be much love lost between her and my Lady Georgiana when they come together."

For two hours or more he waited in the dreary, half-lighted room for his brother's return, his only amusement being to grasp the poker, strike the smoldering logs, and then watch the routed myriads of sparks fly up the wide chimney. At last the outer door opened, Sir Laurence's heavy step crossed the hall; and sensible of a sudden and uncomfortable flush of embarrassment, Oliver rose from his seat by the hearth and listened. There was first the sound of Mistress Dobie's voice announcing his own arrival, followed by a few minutes of dead silence, which seemed to the anxious visitor to lengthen and lengthen themselves out as if they would never end. He experienced some very nervous fluctuations of courage while every instant expecting his injured brother to confront him; but he looked outwardly self-possessed enough when the door opened, and Sir Laurence, entering, stood face to face with him for the first time since they were boys together at Whinstane Tower.

They were quite strangers to each other's appearance now, but they shook hands mechanically, and Sir Laurence was the first to speak, though what he said was as little like a fraternal greeting as it well could be. "Over here on business?" he asked; and Oliver answered with strict truth, "Yes, on business of importance."

"Going on to Whinstane?" inquired Sir Laurence again.

"No; they have put me up at the rectory," was the reply.

"It is close upon dinner-time, will you remain and dine with me?" was the next suggestion, one to which Oliver readily acceded.

And that strange meeting was accomplished, courteously and coldly as a meeting between two strangers!

Sir Laurence then immediately turned back to the door which he had left open, and called aloud for Annis, who came running as swiftly as her little feet would carry her, but paused irresolute when she perceived who was still in possession of the hearth. Her father put an end to her indecision by taking her up in his arms and carrying her to the fireside, but all the while she kept the eyes of suspicious watchfulness on the unwelcome guest; and Oliver Warleigh did some violence to his feelings when, by way of smoothing an avenue to conversation, he remarked that she was a fine child.

"She is like my mother," answered Sir Laurence, and sat down with her on his knee.

Oliver acquiesced, though in reality he could not see the faintest shadow of resemblance — that brown, elfish mite like their beautiful mother! He grew quite sarcastic over the idea inwardly; thought paternal partiality might claim some allowance, but when it reached such a stage of blindness as that, it became only pitiable and ludicrous. With certain persons a little contempt for their company induces a remarkable degree of ease and assurance, and when Oliver Warleigh discovered this weakness in his brother to despise, he found his wits and his tongue loosed, and began to talk fluently in spite of the discouraging brevity of Sir Laurence's replies. He gave his brother a sketch of his own promising young family unasked.

"Our boys take after the Warleighs, and fine, well-grown lads they are. Mortimer is a very fine lad for six years old," said he, "and

his tutor tells us that he shows talent ; but these are early days yet to judge of what he may turn out. As much depends on temperament as on capacity, and he has a lazy, pleasure-loving turn such as is not commonly the making of successful men. But he will have to fight for himself—both my boys will have to fight for themselves, for I shall have nothing to give them ; so it is lucky they are blessed with abundance of mother-wit."

It did not appear that Oliver Warleigh was deficient in paternal partiality any more than Sir Laurence. He then went on to say that Lady Georgiana and he were returning to England permanently in the spring for their children's sake ; and expressing himself as entirely in favor of public school education, asked his brother what was his opinion about it. Sir Laurence could not profess to have any opinion, or to pronounce on the advantages or disadvantages of a system of which he knew nothing. Then Oliver pressed him with the inquiry, whether he thought his own training at home had been good, to which he unhesitatingly replied : "No, as bad as had could be."

"So it was," agreed Oliver ; and then he felt his way cautiously on untried ground by saying that if Sir Laurence had gone to Eton, or Harrow, or Rugby, as a boy, he would scarcely be burying himself alive in Hurtledeale now ; and concluded by asking if he never meditated making any change in his manner of life.

To this his brother abruptly replied, "What change should I make ?" and Oliver suggested that he should return to Whinstane or take Penslaven into his own hands. Sir Laurence answered that he liked the Hurtlemere House better than either, and continued, half absently, to stroke the rosy-flushed cheek of Annis, which was next the fire, as if she were the pervading influence of his reverie, until Oliver, with adventurous boldness, said : "And what must this poor little gipsy lose by being allowed to grow up wild in such an out-of-the-way spot—*she* who must inherit two of the finest estates in the north, unless you alter your mind and marry again."

Sir Laurence started as if he had been stung, and exclaimed, harshly :

"Have you traveled all the way from Paris to ask me that ? You might have spared yourself the pains !"

And then he got up and strode out of the room, taking the child with him. His suspicions of the purport of his brother's undesired visit were evidently aroused ; but Oliver did not allow himself to be discomposed ; he had won a hearing, the object of his embassy had been approached, and though, for the moment, he found himself flung roughly back, he should know how the better to approach it again at a more auspicious moment.

Sir Laurence reappeared without Annis when dinner was on the table, and Oliver, discreetly avoiding all recurrence to personal topics, plunged into the troubled sea of politics, foreign and domestic, and at length succeeded in entangling his brother in an argument on the respective merits of the rival statesmen of the day, between whom party feeling ran high. Dinner over, they drew their chairs to the hearth, and Sir Laurence ordered Annis to be

sent in again. Oliver would have preferred her absence ; and when she came, carrying in her two hands, and propped against her breast, a box of tobacco with a couple of pipes carefully balanced on the top of it, he fancied himself transferred to the parlor of some wayside inn, with this small brown maiden to wait upon the travelers. Sir Laurence asked him if he smoked, and when he said, "No, Lady Georgiana had broken him of the habit directly after their marriage, and he had never attempted to resume it since," his brother replied that Lady Georgiana was unwise ; it was a moral sedative ; blue devils, black devils and all other evil humors vanished in a cloud of good tobacco-smoke.

Annis busied herself in filling her father's pipe, using her little thumb for a stopper, and having seen it alight and curling up in white fragrant wreaths, she appeared to consider her evening duty done, and diverted herself in various ways about the room. At last she settled on her knees by one of the jambs of the chimney-piece, and with a handful of tobacco, abstracted from the box, proceeded to dress in shaggy wigs all the grotesquely carved heads within her reach that embellished it. Oliver Warleigh could not keep his eyes from following the restless movements of the child. He watched her pat the lantern-jaws, and pinch the high noses, and whisper in the great ears as if the things were human, and stick twists of paper in their yawning mouths, and bid them smoke. She appeared to have invested each figure with a name and certain character, and to be enacting scenes in an irregular drama of her own construction. One long-featured, down drooping face, the topmost under the mantelshelf, she addressed as *Sir Sumfit*, and two chubby little sons of Bacchus, crowned with grape-clusters, as *Ye Babes*. The largest head in the center of the jamb was the *Ogre*, and *Ye Babes* were warned with much shaking of Annis's elfish locks, not to come within snap of his great jaws. It struck Oliver Warleigh by and by that the imaginative little mischief was in some way or other connecting *him* with this grinning visage of which it pleased her to feign a shivering terror ; for her eye glanced toward him twice or thrice, and then she committed an inaudible secret to the keeping of *Ye Babes*, and wagged her head with an air of great sagacity, as if desirous of impressing them with its profound importance. He should never forget the thing's antics as long as he lived, he said to Katherine, when he described this quaint scene.

There was no end to Annis's game until Lucy came to carry her away to bed ; but first a biscuit was given her, with which she fed her playfellows, and then was taken on Sir Laurence's knee for a final interval of petting before good-night. Oliver looked on with some impatience while the two discoursed in their little language, and was thankful when it was over ; and Annis, having strained her father's head to her bosom with all the force of her tiny arms, and exclaimed, with passionate fondness, "I love you, papa ; I do love you, papa," was handed over to Lucy. But scarcely had the door closed upon them, than Sir Laurence, as if repenting him of an omission, laid down his pipe and followed ; and the next moment Oliver heard the child's voice

as it receded up the stairs, crying, "Good Donny, faster; trot, Donny, trot!" and, with a rather mean curiosity, he peeped out and saw that his brother was clumsily feigning himself a horse, and giving her a ride to bed.

Oliver laughed when he told this to his sister, and it was not a kind laugh; he thought Sir Laurence a fool and the child as spoiled a little baggage as ever breathed. But Katherine spoke up in their defense.

"I love Laurie for his tenderness," said she, her mother-feeling kindling in her eyes. "I think it is beautiful; and she is a dear wee darling with all her savagery, and only wants system and kindness to make her as docile as other children. I am very fond of Annis, Oliver."

Oliver replied, of course, of course; she was only over-indulged, that was all; but Lady Georgiana was a tight hand, and if ever she came under her rein, she would very soon be broken in. No doubt she would!

When Sir Laurence rejoined his brother, Oliver dextrously contrived to turn the talk once more toward the main object of his embassy, and though Sir Laurence puffed a silent cloud, and seemed little inclined to enter on the conversation, he harangued about Lady Georgiana's skill in the management of children, and the paramount necessity of implanting good early habits in the young in a way that would have done credit to a commissioner of education. Thence he diverged to the remoteness of Hurdledale from all means of instruction; and at last, with sudden earnestness he appealed to his brother to know if he intended keeping his fine, clever little daughter much longer without opportunities of learning; adding, that he had heard from his sisters how she was not even being taught to read.

Sir Laurence replied abruptly that he did not think any change yet necessary.

"The child might be fourteen instead of four, to hear you talk! She will do very well as she is for some time to come. Katherine and Grace have attacked me already, and I have desired them to give themselves no anxiety on my daughter's account."

"You can never send her to school; she would break her heart under the tedium of formal discipline," said Oliver, pressing the charge; "yet the longer she runs wild the more severe will restraint be when it must come."

To this Sir Laurence answered that he had no intention of exiling Annis from home. Then Oliver suggested again that it would be by no means easy to induce any lady capable of giving her an education suited to her rank, to come and live at the Hurdlemere House. Sir Laurence responded that no idea of bringing a stranger thither had ever occurred to him; but he now saw that some scheme in which Annis was concerned was laboring for delivery in Oliver's breast, and he bade him impatiently speak out, and not fence any longer with the question.

Then said Oliver, uncertain for the moment whether he was most relieved or disconcerted by the sudden challenge,

"You have conjectured rightly. The women are more anxious for their little niece's welfare than you suppose; and amongst them they have devised a plan which they declare excellent; this plan is that you should intrust Annis to

Lady Georgiana; besides her two boy-cousins, she would also have our little Clara, only a year younger than herself, for a playmate, and every body who has to do with children knows the value of equal companionship."

Sir Laurence listened in an embarrassing silence, his face betraying nothing of how he was affected, and it was not until the proposition had had several minutes to sink into his mind, that Oliver, perceiving he did not intend to speak, ventured to ask, "Well, Laurence, how does it strike you?"

"I have never seen Lady Georgiana," was the reply.

"But you could see her, either here or at Bristowe," said Oliver. Again Sir Laurence smoked on in mute meditation, and again his brother was reduced to the expedient of asking a direct question. "Will you meet her if she comes over?"

"You must excuse me, Oliver—No," was the brief answer; and after a few minutes' pause Sir Laurence put an end to the debate by saying, "We will not talk of this matter any more. Lady Georgiana I do not know, but you made yourself my enemy; and if my sisters had behaved to Helena as they ought to have done her child would have stood in need of none of their kindnesses now. They mean well, perhaps, but I am not disposed to hear their advice or to be indebted to them for any help. If you have come over specially with this object, I regret that you should have taken so long a journey for nothing—a letter would have answered the purpose quite as well, and have been much less costly in every way."

"I shall not regret it since it has given me the chance of shaking hands with you again after fourteen years, Laurence. We are friends now, are we not?" returned Oliver, plaintively.

"It was not my fault we were ever otherwise," said Sir Laurence, affecting no enthusiasm of gladness at their reunion. Oliver sighed, and there was silence between them for some minutes. The old clock in the hall striking eleven broke it, and warned them that it was time to separate.

"They keep early hours at the rectory, I must be going," said Oliver, and rose with a show of reluctance.

"I will walk with you down the hill," replied Sir Laurence; and the brothers turned out together into the cold starlit night.

At parting the elder suggested a hope of seeing Oliver again before he left Hurdledale, a hope which Oliver gratefully encouraged. Sir Laurence was not so insensible to the elixir of society as he imagined; it was an unconfessed pleasure to him to see his brother's face and hear his voice once more, notwithstanding all that was past and gone; and at their next meeting he invited him to transfer himself from the rectory to the Hurdlemere House, which Oliver did with a good deal of secret, wily exultation.

III.

Nobody, of course, supposed that Oliver Warleigh undertook his mission in behalf of Annis from purely disinterested motives. His wife had brought him a fortune, but by all accounts she was a frightfully extravagant woman. Paris was an expensive place of residence, they kept

up a showy establishment, and their family would now begin to increase in wants with each advancing year, so that the temporary guardianship of Sir Laurence's daughter with a handsome allowance would have been a very acceptable adjunct to their other cares. Thus far Oliver had gained nothing, but he had lost nothing either; and to have re-established a footing in his brother's house, closed against him for so many years, was a desirable end achieved.

He was witness to some rather curious incidents behind the scenes at the Hurltemere House. The first morning when he descended from his room, trim and stately, he found Sir Laurence in a rough frieze coat of genuine Brafferton cut, just rising from his finished breakfast. Annis also was there, done up with a napkin under her chin, eating porridge and milk with excellent appetite. She took the opportunity of the slight diversion caused by her uncle Oliver's entrance to carry her nearly empty platter to the chimney-piece, and was just in the act of putting a spoonful into the Ogre's mouth, when Lucy appeared and prevented the accomplishment of her hospitable designs. Annis was not too well pleased at the interference, though she allowed her dish and spoon to be transferred to the center of the table beyond her reach; and the setting of her lips and perverse little twist of her shoulders betrayed the smoldering rebellion which broke out into frank resistance, when Lucy offered a hand to lead her from the room. Stubbornly intrenching herself amongst the dogs upon the hearth, she braved her mild monitress with a naughty eye, and dared her audibly to touch her. Lucy wisely did not attempt it, and after a little ineffectual coaxing, she glided out of the room as noiselessly as she had come in, leaving Annis triumphant.

Oliver Warleigh was very disagreeably impressed by Lucy's position at the Hurltemere House. He told Katherine that she had the air of a person accustomed to consideration and even deference. He professed to discern in her craft and force of will, and the coolest self-possession, all demurely veiled under a modest simplicity of self-respect that was plausible and well enough acted to deceive any body less versed in the wicked wiles of human nature than himself. Katherine laughed merrily at his ridiculous suspicions. Worldly wisdom may sometimes be a light to the eyes, but almost as often it is a mere mislading Will-o'-the-wisp; and in this instance it had certainly tempted Oliver Warleigh's discernment astray. Lucy knew that she was pretty, and she had that natural love of limited power which is a trait in all intelligent persons of her sex; but she had no more designs on Sir Laurence, which his brother implied she had, than upon the man in the moon. She had plighted her troth a couple of years ago to the eldest son of Robb, at Prior's Mill, and it was to be a match as soon as he could stock a farm and furnish a house to take her to. But the vexatious idea Oliver had conceived concerning her, tipped his tongue with blackest gall of bitterness in speaking of his brother; he said to Katherine that Sir Laurence appeared to him to have degenerated into an absolute boor, and predicted that he might very

probably, if the progress of deterioration continued, end his long mourning for Helena by the commission of the greatest of all possible follies—that of marrying her maid! A pleasant cud for him to chew, this; and his sister did not succeed in convincing him how more than absurd was his fancy.

Annis and he, by his own candid confession, did not grow in each other's good graces; though the evenings passed not unpleasantly at the Hurltemere House. He became more anxious for the success of his mission every day he staid there; his earnestness arising from a desire to get Lucy away along with the child. Yet he steadily refrained himself from the topic that was uppermost in his thoughts, and when he and his brother were alone, laid himself out to amuse, telling his best society stories in his best society manner, that he might not risk losing all by over eagerness in pressing a distasteful subject.

Sir Laurence smoked his meditative pipes and said little, but his brother's company was becoming very pleasant to him. It was long since he had entertained friend or kinsman at his lonely fireside. At distant intervals appeared his steward, Mr. Bond, and at still more distant, John Withers spent an evening with him, and these were the only two guests Annis knew as hearing her father company.

She liked to see Mr. Bond and John also; for the first brought her gingerbread, and the second set her up to say a long ballad, and always commended her proficiency with a pat on the crown; which, as Annis loved praise, was perhaps as acceptable as the spice-cake. But the new stranger who called himself uncle Oliver, was by no means so welcome; some instinct deeper than reason warned her against his surface cordiality, and she kept watch over him in a spirit of distrustful defiance which she was too young to dissimulate.

One evening she was invited to display before him her powers of recitation, but she left Sir Sumfit and Ye Babes reluctantly, and when perched on her father's knee for the triumphant exhibition, with a precocity of malice, which would express itself by parable rather than not at all, she proceeded to chant the Ballad of The Babes in the Wood, addressing the narrative portions toward the dogs, and the denunciations of the cruel uncle toward her kinsman with the oddest little naughty look sparkling in her eyes that ever child wore; and when requested to bid him proper good-night afterward, she turned suddenly, took a long stare at him, shook her elf-locks and decamped. Oliver Warleigh laughed, but there was neither laugh nor love in his heart, and it was by no means a benevolent aspiration when he wished Lady Georgiana had her! But even Lady Georgiana might meet her match. She was equal to icing a baby's tears, but whether she was equal to icing the passionate blood of such an one as Sir Laurence's little wildling was yet to be tried.

On another occasion he witnessed an awful instance of her waywardness and of her father's indulgence which had a worse effect on his temper than any demonstration of dislike toward himself that had preceded it. One evening he proposed to his brother a ride to Bristowe for

the next morning; the weather being fine and the roads good, why should they not go? Sir Laurence did not say why not, but he demurred—could not Oliver go alone? Oliver replied that of course he could, but a ride over the moor was pleasanter in company than in solitude; he did not urge the matter, however, and at breakfast he was in no way surprised to hear his brother announce that he had changed his mind and would go to Bristowe; but he was surprised and annoyed too when Sir Laurence added that Annis would accompany them in fulfillment of an old promise to Mrs. Damer Warleigh.

"Can the little monkey ride so far?" he asked, darting a very sharp glance at the small porridge-devourer who faced him.

She nodded her head and said, "Farther," without the addition of an explanatory word.

Oliver Warleigh resigned himself. The elfish mite seemed to have penetrated his feelings and to be enjoying his vexation with imp-like malice. Breakfast over, the horses were ordered, and when Sir Laurence and his brother went out they found Annis already mounted on her black pony, a swift, sure-footed, handsome little beast, docile to her hand and word as a well-trained dog. She was clad in a heather-colored habit of rough Scotch cloth, and wore a boy's cap, with a silver thistle in front, tied under her chin. She was as fearless and as much at home on her pony as amongst the dogs on the hearth, and her uncle Oliver reluctantly admitted to himself at last, that the little gipsy, in spite of her dark looks and nut-brown skin, was a very beautiful child.

Annis was a chatterbox; her tongue wagged fast, and for some distance she absorbed the chief part of the talk; but by and by when they came to where the road turned across the open moors, she would have cantered off by herself had not her father, though he loosed the leading rein, bidden her keep close by his side. He looked down at her from time to time very thoughtfully and very fondly as if he were turning over in his mind some design fraught with pain to both. And so it presently appeared that he was. Peremptorily as he had at first refused to entertain the proposal made to him of intrusting Annis to Lady Georgiana, it had since recurred to him as perhaps worth consideration; and he now introduced the subject himself by saying to Oliver that he supposed he should have to let his little gipsy leave him soon, though it would be very hard lines for her, go when and where she would.

Oliver had much ado to repress the thrill of triumph that stirred in his heart at this unexpected symptom of yielding on his brother's part; but he replied with an air of sympathy and encouragement that she was young enough yet to be very easily molded to new manners. He then led the conversation to Lady Georgiana, pleasing particulars of whom he was fluent in detailing. After some general remarks on the advantages of living abroad, he went on to state his intentions with reference to a home in England, and to expound all the beautiful plans for the bringing-up of an heiress, with which his clever wife had primed him beforehand. Sir Laurence heard him patiently, and though he said it would be much against the grain when-

ever he let her go, he acknowledged that it might very probably be her best chance of good training and good treatment; and perhaps with an ulterior view of insuring both, he made some reference to the money part of the negotiation which Oliver airily set aside as quite secondary; though anybody who knew him must know that it would be his chief consideration.

The affair had got into this promising cue, while Annis, trotting demurely at her father's side, heard every word; a stormy resolution gathered up in her dark little face as she listened, and at the climax, she wheeled her pony suddenly round, gave him a smart stroke with her whip, and galloped back over the moor as fast as it would carry her; believing that she was immediately to be decoyed away and given up to her wicked uncle! Oliver Warleigh was for instant pursuit, but Sir Laurence lifted a hasty hand and bade him hold back, crying aloud, "Mind the quarry, my birdie," and then Annis was seen to draw rein, to swerve into a lower track, and so to continue her homeward flight straight as an arrow from a bow.

"That danger's over, thank God!" said Sir Laurence; "Brownie will carry her now safe to his stable-door. But you see what she is, Oliver, and it can not be helped. I must ride after her, but you go on to Bristowe."

This, however, Oliver was secretly too much provoked to do—besides he wished to see the end of the sprite's adventure.

So far from being ashamed of her misconduct or afraid of any consequences, Annis was sitting in the sun on the steps outside the porch awaiting her father and uncle; and as soon as they appeared she ran to the former and, clinging to his hand, laughed and danced up and down with high spirits as if she had performed some admirable feat for which she expected to be praised. But Sir Laurence looked grave, and lifting her up in his arms, asked if she did not know she had been very naughty, on which she rubbed her soft little face against his, curled round his neck, and with wily caresses refused to see or to know any thing but that she was papa's darling with whom he could not really be angry. He kissed her before he set her down, but he attempted no further admonition, neither did he apologize to his brother for his being disappointed of the ride to Bristowe; and when Oliver would have reverted to the momentous theme which her flight had so inopportunistically interrupted, he entreated him to let it drop.

"It will not do to send her away so young—she is unmanageable except by Lucy," said he, impatiently. "We may perhaps talk of it more seriously when she has got another year over her head. And even then there will be woeeful scenes to go through, for her love is strong and her will is strong, and her temper has never known the curb."

So much the better reason, Oliver thought, that it should learn to know it without any further delay; but after Sir Laurence's decisive words he felt that, for the present, it was advisable to consider the negotiation at an end.

17.

Though Oliver Warleigh had not succeeded in the chief object of his mission, he could not be said to have had his journey for naught; for

while he was at the Hurltemere House Sir Laurence promised to undertake all the charges of his eldest boy's education and future launch in the world. Oliver had represented himself as almost an object of charity, and told him that but for Lady Georgiana's fortune they could barely have lived; and that as the boys grew up and went to Eton, they should have to practice a severity of economy that neither of them would relish. His sister Katherine was very incredulous of these statements; for she knew that he had carried away from Whinstane and Penslaven, far more of spoils both before and after his father's death than he had any right to, and that if he was poor now, it could only be by his own and his wife's fault. She did not know whether most to admire Sir Laurence's generous forgiveness of Oliver, or most to fear what looked like a weak return of trust and confidence in him; Laurence had not a grain of falsehood in his own nature, and therefore could not suspect his brother of persistent guile and double-dealing. Oliver was a clever and specious man, but true he was not; and when she perceived how much more he wanted Annis as a prize for his pocket than for the child's own good, for a little moment she felt more bent on circumventing than on helping him.

In Sir Laurence's resentment against those who had not acknowledged his poor young wife, there was no taint of vindictiveness—though he hardly forgave he could not condescend to persecute; and when he found himself looked up to as the wealthy head of the family, he did with a free hand what was expected from him. Oliver was astonished at his generosity, but he was not touched; his heart was not of that nature which can be touched by magnanimity or made grateful by benefits.

The brothers dined at the rectory together one evening, and John Withers, who had not seen them side by side for nearly fifteen years, was struck with the conspicuous difference between them; far greater now than when they were boys. The elder was the taller man by a couple of inches, the better built and handsomer in feature, but his gait was become heavy and slouching, he carried his head down, and his dress differed in no wise from that of the rudest yeoman farmer in the dales—a stranger might have supposed him to be one of them without discrediting his discernment in any measure. Oliver, on the contrary, who inherited the high-bred delicacy of his mother's face, and had lived the life of gay society under the tutelage of a wife, clever, fond and fashionable, was a mirror of grace, polish and surface courtesy; but he was extremely disagreeable to some people notwithstanding. His brothers-in-law disliked and distrusted him, and old Mrs. Sara Grandage bestowed on him the epithet of *serpentine*; to Rachel Withers he was just the same velvet-gloved Oliver with the claws as formerly; so smooth and sleek, but yet with a deadly spring in him and a cruel, ruthless grip under his bland softness.

He fancied he had taken pretty Lucy's measure, but she had taken his with a much shrewder accuracy, and had told Mary Wray that she hoped Sir Laurence would never let Annis out of his sight—"at least not in *his* hands;" which insinuation had thrown Mary into fresh anxiety

about her foster-child. From the moment Oliver Warleigh entered the Hurltemere House Lucy's spirit had revolted against him; for treacherous as his conduct toward his brother had been, the popular voice had magnified it, and with many his name was a by-word for cunning and cruelty. She watched and saw the observation he spent on Annis; and the weight he attached to her words and ways; and when she felt that he doubted *her*, her doubt of him redoubled; for why should he cast an evil eye on *her* unless because she was the child's most active guardian?

However, relief to all those who feared and suspected him was at hand. Having no further temptation to remain in the monotonous seclusion of Hurltedale, Oliver Warleigh betook himself home again to his Lady Georgiana in Paris. Sir Laurence said to Katherine, "He was in haste to begone;" and she detected a strong undercurrent of disappointment in the way he spoke. Oliver was cat-witted; he could see and seize an immediate advantage; but he was not apt at reading the subtler sentiments of any heart less self-absorbed than his own, or he might have guessed that his hurried departure as soon as he had gained all he was likely to gain, would leave a harsh impression on his brother's mind. It did so. A good and generous feeling had been blighted in Sir Laurence, but the natural warmth still lingered amongst the embers of his life, which, drawn together by a tender and faithful hand, might still have kindled again into heat and flame. His sister Katherine perceived a sensible change in him during the week Oliver staid at the Hurltemere House; he had yielded to a belief that for some little love of him, some real though late repentance, Oliver had sought him in his solitude; but his prompt flight when he had made the utmost profit out of his brother's generous mood, had quite spoiled him of that pleasing imagination. For a little while after, Sir Laurence seemed sterner and less contented than before his visit.

One day Annis went down to spend the morning at the rectory with her cousins Dicky and Andrew, whom she tumbled about like nine-pins on their nursery-floor, and being asked if she was not sorry to bid her uncle Oliver good-by, answered without reserve, "No, she was very glad."

"But he is going to send you some toys all the way from Paris," urged Aunt Katherine in reference to a promise of his.

"I don't want any, and he shall not come back here. He is ugly—I don't like him; he wants to take me away from papa, but I won't go!" answered the child, emphasizing her resolution by casting down on the floor one of Dicky's doll's tea-cups, which was broken in its fall; but she had no repentance for the disaster in that fiery moment.

The little gipsy had comprehended all the length and breadth of the family plots so far as she was personally concerned, and further talk with her elicited no modification of her first expressions of antipathy. She was particularly strong on the point of her uncle Oliver's ugliness; and to a child's instinctive discernment, notwithstanding his handsome features, he might be ugly; for there was no kindness in his heart,

and no pretense of it in his manner, and his countenance was often darkling and bad.

A general feeling of distrust was thus all Oliver Warleigh left behind him as the result of his first embassy to the Hurltemere House; and he went away not altogether unconscious of it.

CHAPTER THE SECOND.

OLIVER WARLEIGH'S SECOND EMBASSY.

ONE may smile, and smile, and be a villain.
SHAKESPEARE.

L.

ONE afternoon early in the month of April Mrs. Sara Grandage and Rachel Withers were driving leisurely up the lane by the Force Farm when they saw Lucy waiting in the garden and Annis swinging on the gate.

"How do you do, Annis, and how is papa?" cried Bittersweet, nodding out of the window at the child. Annis only stared and went on swinging, but the sound of carriage-wheels brought Mary Wray into the porch, cloaked and bonneted as if for a walk. She made a gesture which caused Clip to pull up his horses, and running down into the road, apologized for the liberty she took in stopping them; but said she was going to the Hurltemere House to nurse Sir Laurence; he was ill, he had got a fever, and wanted somebody handy to look after him.

"I thought may be, Mrs. Withers didn't know; happen you'll call an' tell her on your way back," added she.

They promised to do so, and then Mary, snatching Annis from her dizzy elevation, took her by the hand and set off in haste up the pastures; while Lucy, at a sign from Rachel, delayed a moment to give them a little further explanation.

Sir Laurence, she said, had been ailing for more than a fortnight past; he had caught a cold which he could not shake off, but he had refused to have Dr. Beane sent for until this morning, when his sufferings had increased so much as to make medical advice imperatively necessary. The doctor did not foresee danger, but he said Sir Laurence ought to have been in his bed a week ago; and would not promise him a good deliverance without quiet and caution now. He advised that Mary Wray, whose skill as a sick nurse was of the highest repute in the dale, should be sent for; so Lucy had brought Annis out for a walk, and summoned her straightway.

"We need not alarm Katherine," said Mrs. Sara Grandage, as the carriage drove on. "We will just tell her Sir Laurence is not well, and that Beane has seen him—a strong man like him can not risk much from a feverish cold."

This was Bittersweet's way; being as tough as bend-leather herself, she never believed any body else could all much.

But when they stopped at the rectory to deliver Mary's message, they found that the ill-news had flown fast enough to get there before them, and that both John and Katherine were gone up to the Hurltemere House themselves.

"Annis was as gay as a lark, so it can not be very serious," then said the old lady; "and even if Sir Laurence has a good bout of fever it may be all the better for him eventually; it

will purge away old melancholies, and make a new man of him. I would not pull a long face yet, Dumpling, if I were you."

Dumpling did not know she was pulling a long face, but she was thinking it would be a woeiful day for Sir Laurence's little wildling if any thing happened to him. She had never given her adhesion to the scheme her sister-in-law had conceived of sending Annis to be brought up by Lady Georgiana. She knew them both, and felt sure Annis would not take kindly to the polishing processes by which her little cousins were made such perfect specimens of obedience and propriety. It seemed almost wicked, all the conspiring to take her away from her father whom she worshiped, for the sake of handing her over to the formal charities of that freezing wife of Oliver's. What a martyrdom of clipping and training the hapless little mortal would have to undergo before her civilization was accomplished! What matter if she did say a few Catholic prayers and hymns, and recite a few rude ballads in a provincial dialect; she had better grow up heathen or savage than dwindle and die under the icy manipulations of Lady Georgiana!

All this Rachel thought, and all this she said to her godmamma, who was much inclined to take her view of part of the facts; but who believed that Katherine's anxiety to remove Annis from the Hurltemere House was greatly augmented by her desire to see Sir Laurence make a change in his method of living. The one alteration she hoped might lead to the other.

In this Rachel acquiesced; she knew well how both his sisters mourned his alienation from society and from themselves. The outward court-esties of kinship were observed between them, but Sir Laurence had never forgiven their neglect of Helena's letter and of herself. On his unjust persistence in blaming them, they never commented; they thought *now*, indeed, that if they had dared their father's wrath and disobeyed his commands it would have been right; but as for poor Helena, she was not made to grow old! They might have rejoiced her brief life with their kindness, and have crowned her early departing with one longed for, inexpressible comfort; but her death came from the hands of God and none other; and not all the love in the world could have staid it for a single day.

II.

Little Annis, much against her will, was transferred to the nursery at the rectory during her father's illness, and immediately the news of it reached Paris, Oliver Warleigh hastened back to the Hurltemere House.

Sir Laurence had a hard and sharp struggle for his life, and when the crisis was over, a long languor succeeded to the fierce trouble of his delirium. Oliver watched him with a haggard anxiety, and as soon as Dr. Beane pronounced his brother saved, he seemed almost like to give up and die in his stead! John and Katherine advised his speedy departure to Hastings, where Lady Georgiana had just established herself in lodgings with her children; and when the worst was past, he followed their advice. It was time he went; unless his nervous excitability got some rest soon, he would be laid up himself; and he felt it.

He looked half worn out, and Bittersweet maliciously said,—

"He is going to be ill of Sir Laurence's getting better!"

Other people besides Bittersweet thought he was disappointed at the issue, but of course they spoke low when they spoke so; except Rachel Withers, who replied to her godmamma's sarcasm, "God forgive me if I wrong him, but I do believe he is the only person akin to Sir Laurence who does not rejoice in his safety!"

After a month's stay at the rectory, Annis went home again, and a most sensible relief to her aunt Katherine her departure was; for the charge of her during this time of trouble had been as onerous as the charge of a freshly-caught wild animal. She was constantly on the watch to circumvent Lucy, and run away home to her father. She was quiet enough now that she was back with him, and would sit in his room by the hour together as still as a mouse, without either speaking or moving; only resting her cheek against his lean hand as it hung down over the bed-side, and caressing it with her wee soft palms.

"Make the most of your time, loving little Annis: it will not be for very long now," he said to her one day.

"I am going to stay with you always, papa," was her reply; so he left her in her blissful delusion.

But the decree had gone forth; the verdict that pronounced Sir Laurence rescued from his imminent peril, pronounced their separation;—as soon as he could travel he would be allowed neither rest nor peace until he went away—so decided Bristowe, so also Katherine and John. Dr. Beane would not guarantee him another year of life without a thorough change of habits, and against that sentence even his own obstinacy could not stand firm. Annis seemed to be the only impediment, and every body was utterly resolved that she should not stand in his way. Oliver said little—perhaps he was not just then capable of saying much; but when he went to Hastings, he knew that so far as Annis was concerned, the day was his own; for his brother's extremity had brought round his opportunity.

The child was not warned of what awaited her, but gentle measures were adopted to wean her from some of her wildest idocilities. Lucy adopted toward her the most tenderly protective airs; for she and Mistress Dobie had a quarrel on the subject of Annis's behavior.

Said Mistress Dobie:

"She's a like lady, an' must ha' a lady's bringing up. Miss Katherine and Miss Grace, when they was her age, was twice as forward an' high learned, an' bo' an' courtesy they did as pretty as my lady herself; but Miss Annis an't got no manners at all, an' you pettles her ower much by half."

Then Lucy protested:

"She don't want no manners; she is a deal better without if they'd make her as proud and hard-hearted as her aunts!" for Lucy had not forgotten one slight passed on her dear, dead mistress.

Every body was agreed that when Annis went, Lucy must go with her—to break her fall as it were; and though Robb's son at the mill said

he should "be wanting her at the back-end," he was told that he must have patience a little longer. But he had got the promise of the Uppgill Farm which the present tenant was leaving at Lady-day; the summer would see the house duly renovated and made ready for its pretty mistress, and after harvest he declared he would brook no longer delay. Therefore if Lucy went away with her darling at all, it must be soon.

The main change was generally regarded as settled, but the nearer it came to be made, the more uneasy grew Mary Wray as to whether it would be quite safe for her foster-child to go to her uncle Oliver's house. Lucy had infected Mary with her own distrust of him, and as her difficulty and distress about it were too delicately personal to be laid before the rector's wife, she brought them down to Rachel Withers and unfolded them before her.

She began by saying that Lucy was "rather a chancy body for taking likes and dislikes; she was full of her megrims, and did Miss Rachel think there was ought in them?"—a question much easier to ask than to answer.

"Lucy says she can't abide him—nayther art nor part of him," proceeded she, recapitulating the young woman's precise expressions. "She don't like his slant eyes, nor his voice that he always drops as if he was afraid of the hearing of his own words, nor yet his way of turning about, an' peeping, an' listening. He's deep an' he's sharp too. I once thought him a fair-spoken gentleman enough, but nor me now nayther, Miss Rachel, I shouldn't wish to come under his grindstone. I saw him while master lay ill, an' it wasn't *his* good wishes nor *his* prayers that mended him. Show me a pattern o' the stuff an' I'll tell you what t' piece is. Talk o' Sir Laurence being a hard man; he'd stand up front to his enemy, but Oliver, he'd stab his i' the back, an' lick th' knife after for th' sweetness o' revenge!"

Mary Wray used strong words when she warned to her subject, but the strongest found an echo in Rachel Withers' heart; though she did not dare add the weight of her own feeling against Oliver Warleigh to the doubts Mary entertained. She afterward spoke to her godmamma about what had passed, but Bittersweet gave another testimony. "I do not believe that Oliver Warleigh's passions will ever carry him over the borders of the most respectable vices," said she. "He is quietly lavish, grasping and self-seeking in practice, but his moral theories are of the best. He is a plausible, skillful, cautious person, and I dare say he will live all his days in success and end them in peace and honor—unless, indeed, the devil assail him with some very strong and safe temptation."

Rachel in the face of this opinion would have been ashamed to confess her own suspicions, but her mind misgave her sorely in secret that the choice of a new home for Annis was about the worst that could have been made. But the responsibility was none of hers; her voice was never heard in the matter from first to last.

III.

About the middle of May the first step toward the ultimate change was made by Sir Laurence going over with Annis to Bristowe,

where Oliver Warleigh and Lady Georgiana were to meet them in the course of a few days. Annis was in blissful ignorance of what was preparing for her, and played round her father and Lucy as merrily as at home. Rachel Withers had gone to Bristowe as Katherine's deputy, she being detained at the rectory by her own urgent private affairs; and the quiet, kind soul was as thankful for the respite to Annis as if she herself were on the point of being consigned to Lady Georgiana's guardianship. It is impossible to say that Annis was a *good* little girl as good little girls are commonly estimated, but she was very loving and very lovable; as truthful as the light, and so brave by nature that nothing daunted her. Every body at Bristowe took to her amazingly.

Arthur Hill and Grace were there—Grace rather invalidish, as she always was, and now seeming more so because she showed herself aggrieved that Annis was not to be intrusted to her. But Mrs. Damer Warleigh and the common-sense of the family generally, had been against her undertaking so weighty a charge from the very first; Lady Georgiana, with her robust health and successful practical management of her own children, appeared to every one except Rachel, Lucy and Mary Wray, much better suited to it.

There had been a tender leaving-taking between Mary and her foster-child before Annis set off; and so, for that matter, had there been between Annis and her pony, the dogs, Mathew and Mistress Dobie, and even Sir Sumfit, Ye Babes and the Ogre; but this was the little gipsy's first going away from home, and though she was allowed to believe that she should return within a week, it was still a mighty serious occasion.

Lucy had leave of absence from Hurtledeale for three months, at the end of which term of probation it was hoped that Annis would be sufficiently settled and at home with her cousins to dispense with her services. Lady Georgiana strongly objected at first to her going with the child at all, as likely to do more harm than good; but Sir Laurence made such a point of it that she was compelled to yield her opinion to his. Lucy also had a decided feeling on the matter, and even expressed herself as exceedingly *jealous* of what might arise out of an arrangement which she had from the beginning thought wrong. But whatever any body thought, the chief persons concerned were not warned, and were not suspicious of any possible mischief; and those who feared, and those who doubted of results, could now but keep such fears and such doubts to themselves, and hope for the best.

Sir Laurence was gaining strength, but the gray pallor of recent illness still showed in his face, and it was quite touching to see Annis with her brown and rosy visage pressed up against his, that he might catch some of her color, as she said. They were almost constantly together, and Squire Damer Warleigh often made a third with them, being all the more welcome probably when he brought two or three dogs in his train. The willful little gipsy disdained the mild amusements of the morning room, and always made haste to escape from the blandishments of the womenkind, to the

society of any creature out of doors. Annis was much more partial at this date to the other sex than to her own. Toward her aunt Grace she betrayed a manifest disfavor by reason of her having indiscreetly proposed a daily reading lesson; she was now supposed to have conquered the alphabet, but she passed a by no means triumphant examination when Rachel Withers tried her with the big letters on the top of a reel of thread. Still she had a wonderful memory for any thing learned by rote, and a very brief spell of training and teaching would bring her up to the level of the most "high learned" children of her age. She was strong and hardy as a little mountain pony at this period, and tumbled down and picked herself up again with many a bruise and graze, but never a thought of tears.

"You need not be anxious for her, she will take a great deal of killing," said Mrs. Damer Warleigh, when Grace expressed some doubt as to how she would bear the total change and separation.

A great deal of killing! well, even that was a sort of comfort to reflect on in case Lady Georgiana should prove a martinet. Every body would naturally have felt more uncertainty as to the issue of the experiment had Annis been a frail, delicate sprite, instead of the tough little wildling she was.

A few days longer of her happy unconsciousness went by; then the Oliver Warleighs arrived, bringing their eldest boy with them, and a change came suddenly over the spirit of her dream. Oh! the resentful countenance she showed to all around her; what deep gloom in her eyes, what resolute indignation on her set lips! The intensity of her wrath was hardly childlike; so helpless, yet so strong was it that it seemed more like the amazed rage of some entrapped animal. In vain Mortimer coaxed her to play with him—she would not stir from her father's side. When he was out of doors, there was she, hanging to his hand; when he was indoors, there sat she on the floor embracing his leg, and defying every one of them with her slow, dark glances.

Lady Georgiana was serene and amiable; nothing disturbed her cold placidity. Said Grace to her one day half crying, "It will never do; the child will break her heart!" To which her sister-in-law replied, laughing at her serious air, "Nonsense! things of that age have not found out yet that they have any hearts to break. Away from her father she will forget him in a month!"

Rachel Withers was present, and her quiet spirit rose at this. "Forget her father in a month—no, that will she not!" cried she. "I would back Gipsy's remembrance of those she loves to outlast some of ours by many and many a day!" Lady Georgiana gave Rachel after this quite a shivering *feel*; it might be prejudice, but whether from prejudice or a well-grounded reason, she could not endure her.

Oliver was quite at home in the situation—plausible, kind, considerate, and anxious to put every body else at ease. His eldest boy, Mortimer, was really a clever, well-behaved little fellow, perfectly obedient, and yet not cowed; he loved his stony-bosomed Spartan mother,

watched her eye, forestalled her commands, and seemed to let his very thoughts move only under her authority. It would need many, many weary efforts of coercion to trim Annis into this perfection of order and discipline.

One night after she was gone to bed Sir Laurence and Rachel Withers had a little talk together about her. He said, "You are the only woman who was kind to Helena except Mrs. Damer Warleigh; and you are the only woman her child takes to."

Rachel replied that Annis was more familiar with her face—that was all.

"I wish from my heart she were to be familiar with no other," rejoined he; and then he got up and walked away looking perplexed and gloomy. Presently he came back and began to ask if Rachel approved of Lady Georgiana. What could she say? She told him she thought her very successful in the management of children.

"Yes," muttered he; "but Annis manifests more repugnance to her than to any of them—it is just the scared shyness of the filly to the rough rider who is to break her in."

Here Oliver interrupted them and challenged his brother to a game at chess.

It was not Rachel only who had conceived an aversion for Lady Georgiana when domesticated with her in the same house. Mrs. Damer Warleigh's kind heart yearned with pity over the child as the time for her departure drew near; and her change of mood testified to her fear and loathing of her future guardians.

"I wish I had never meddled in the matter," she said to Grace soon after Oliver and his wife arrived; "and the Squire does not half approve of it either. 'Tis a pity Kate could not take her—but then Kate has her hands full, and Laurence perhaps would not have consented."

"Kate could not manage her, and the difficulty of keeping her from running away to the Hurtlemere House would have made their lives together a continual fight," replied Grace; "but she might have been suffered to come to me. Arthur was not unwilling, and I could have found her playmates enough. She would have made up to me for having no children of my own. I shall always think they *might* have trusted her to me."

IV.

Annis was not distinctly apprised of her destiny until the evening before she was parted from her father. On that last night Sir Laurence himself told her that in the morning she must go away with her aunt Georgiana and her cousin Mortimer, and that to please papa she must not cry but be a good little darling.

She never quite believed it until that moment; for she looked up at him with a dumb, imploring gaze, stretched her hand to his face, then hid her eyes against his breast and never spoke. She was making her mute resignation of his love. Only Rachel Withers was present besides themselves; and she had not expected this, neither had Sir Laurence. Tears and violence they were prepared for, but not this silent agony. For ever so long a pin might have been heard to drop in the room. Sir Laurence sat with his face bent down over the loving little head,—a most pitiful tenderness in the whole attitude of

him. By and by he got up and carried her into the quiet garden, all lovely with the freshness of spring, and walked about with her in his arms until dusk; then Rachel lost sight of them for a little while, and about nine o'clock he came into the drawing-room alone. Rachel went to peep at her before going to her own room, and found her fast asleep with Lucy sitting by her pillow softly sobbing—she said it was a shame, a cruel shame, so it was, to take the poor little bairn from her father, and she wished they might not all live to repent it!

The next morning before any body had moved from the breakfast-table, Sir Laurence's horse and Annis's pony passed the window—he was going to ride with her one stage on her journey. The rest of the traveling party were to follow in the carriage half an hour later.

And that was the last glimpse any of them at Bristowe had of the dear, pretty gipsy, perched on her beloved Brownie, and gazing round from face to face with dark, dry eyes: *theirs* were not dry.

"It is like the grief of a woman!" sobbed Grace as they rode away, the Squire walking down the avenue beside Annis, and endeavoring to make the scene more cheerful with buoyant, loud-voiced talk. Rachel ran up to the gallery window, and watched along the road until they were out of sight, but neither turned or looked back for a moment.

Mrs. Damer Warleigh expected Sir Laurence would return to Bristowe, but he did not; and when the servants came back with the carriage after depositing Lucy and the Oliver Warleighs at the railway-station, they brought a message to the effect that Sir Laurence had gone straight away to the Hurtlemere House after seeing his little daughter off.

"Did she fret?" Rachel asked of old James, the coachman. He couldn't say she did fret—not to be seen. She was a good plucked one, that was what she was!

The women would rather have heard of a storm of passionate tears than of that quiet, inward bleeding, so unnatural in a child—but they repeated to each other for consolation old James's testimony to her courage. She was a good plucked one, that was what she was; and she would take a great deal of killing.

CHAPTER THE THIRD.

A RUMOR, AND WHAT CAME OF IT.

How oft the sight of means to do ill deeds
Makes ill deeds done,—SHAKESPEARE.

I.

RACHEL WITHERS returned to Hurtledeale two days after Annis was taken away from Bristowe, to find the rectory in serene possession of a new baby. It was a girl this time, and Rachel stood godmother, giving it her own plain name, which was presently exchanged for the ridiculous one of Sacharissa Tulip, a name which stuck by the injured child until she was quite a young woman. In this stage of her existence, she was certainly kissed as if she were the essence of sweetness, except by Dicky and merry Andrew, who protested that there was no fun in girls, and would have liked to harter her in her long-clothes for another boy.

Rachel was pleased with her acquisition. She did not go into insane ecstasies over it, but she liked it in a highly proper, sufficient, feminine manner—quite as much as could reasonably be expected from a woman of four-and-twenty, cut out by nature, as Mrs. Sara Grandage averred, for an old maid. Since she went to live at Prior's Bank, she had gradually become a little stouter, squarer, and more quietly formal in her manners; and when she tried to nurse Katherine's tiny petkin, she was found not to have the knack of handling a baby. It made a point of doubling up the moment it was put into her arms, and its precious little head was not screwed on quite tight enough to satisfy her of its security—only one turn more would have done it. She never had any real enjoyment of the comical creature until it was about ten months old, when it took air-baths on a thick blanket on the nursery-floor; but this was not yet, and, meanwhile, Katherine, hurt in her mother's feelings by Rachel's incapability, told her it was a shame to see her so stupid and helpless with a baby.

"I can't help it," retorted Rachel; "it would not do if we were all alike. You are becoming so very wife and very mother that you have not a thought to spare for any thing beyond the four walls of home, and John is growing ridiculously fat from being taken so much care of," and Katherine was growing of amazingly comfortable proportions too, though she fancied herself quite thin! It was a very happy, easy household at the rectory, and though Rachel and Katherine tiffed a little now and then over Sacharissa Tulip, they were excellent friends in the main.

"Stay tea; Mr. Pemberton is coming," whispered Katherine on this occasion. "There is no affinity between godpapas and godmamas amongst Protestants, you know, and John likes him so much."

Mr. Pemberton was John's curate; a gentleman with some private means, middle-aged, and a good scholar, but high-shouldered, plain-featured, and rather absent. He had stood godfather with Rachel and Grace for Sacharissa Tulip; and had betrayed what Katherine considered a very promising inclination toward Rachel's society. But Rachel did not encourage him.

"It is no use trying to make a match for me, Kate, I am cut out for an old maid," was her reply to her sister-in-law's invitation; on which Katherine said she was a foolish, provoking, obstinate woman, and let her go her own quiet, reserved way, which was not the way to win her Mr. Pemberton's shy affections.

Indeed, he married about a year after this Miss Fanny Grantley, who was a good girl but not diffident, and both John and Katherine felt that it was quite Rachel's own fault. They gave her up thenceforward to her godmamma's unmitigated rule, agreeing that perhaps she was contented at Prior's Bank, and, if she were, it was useless endeavoring to better a lot that satisfied her. But this is advancing matters.

When Rachel came home from Bristowe, she found Mrs. Sara Grandage in a mood of vexation over a letter from Mr. Gilsland, which had reached her by post the morning before. After the Gilslands left Brafferton she had helped them twice or thrice with money, until, at length,

they had fixed themselves on her as pensioners; and very troublesome, exacting pensioners they proved. She accompanied each remittance with a warning that it was to be the *last*, but the next humble petition found her as ready to undraw her purse-strings as ever. This time their plea was that they had met with a very poorly-paid curacy in Wiltshire, and were desirous of entrapping some private pupils of either sex "deprived of parental care," as their advertisement set forth.

"Unhappy private pupils!" ejaculated Bittersweet, offering the letter for Rachel's perusal. "I hope, Dumpling, you return grateful thanks on your stubborn little knees every day of your life for having been preserved from that man? You ought to bless Betsy Briggs as the greatest benefactress woman ever had!"

No; Rachel did not look on the matter entirely in that light.

"Mr. Gilsland is not so bad as his wife," was her perverse reply. "He would not write begging letters unless she made him—she dictated this precious epistle."

"Oh, oh!" laughed her godmamma, and then vindictively rejoined, "I stung my forefinger with a brier this morning and can not hold a pen; therefore you must answer the 'precious epistle' for me, and decline compliance with its request."

"No, that will I not—not if it goes unanswered until doomsday," Rachel with decision assured her.

"Then you will be the cause of my wasting money on their worthlessness—you will be the cause of wretched orphans being made more wretched still; for I shall inclose them a handsome check instead of writing if you refuse to do it."

Rachel did refuse, and Bittersweet did inclose them a handsome check. John Withers gave her some strong advice on the subject, happening to drop in at the moment; but she put it away for future use instead of at once applying it to the case, and she had the provoking malice to say to her goddaughter when she had done it:

"It is all for your sake, Dumpling! As long as I live I shall periodically pick these interesting folks out of the mire, and when I am gone the Christian duty will devolve upon you."

Rachel was annoyed at her way of putting the case, and warmly repelled the idea that she could under any circumstances come forward as his helper; but Bittersweet only raised her eyebrows incredulously and bade her give over protesting.

"My dear little Dumpling, it is of no use talking to me—I know you. You would give that man three fourths of your last sixpence, and he would take it. You have an utter contempt for him, but for old love's sake—now don't get into a passion—for old love's sake, I repeat it, you would not see him down without longing to give him a lift—and lucky it is for some men that some women are made of your disposition. Don't talk to me about his not deserving it—if we charitable worldly folks only helped those who *deserve* it, want and wickedness would soon be starved off the face of the earth together. Dumpling, you are more than ever a goose!"

Perhaps so, but Bittersweet could put forth

her cackle of nonsense too. Rachel wished in her heart that Mr. Gilsland were comfortably transported to some place where she should never hear of him again. Her temper was not prone to revenge, and therefore it was always more or less of a pain to her to hear of his troubles; and his permanent extrication from them would have been welcomed by her. It was disagreeable to revert to her old follies and mortifications, now that she had done with them; but if any body supposed that a sentimental halo surrounded Mr. Gilsland in her memory still, because she had once been such an ineffable simpleton as to love him, any body was much mistaken. There were moments when she felt an almost intolerable sense of shame for her past absurdities—how handsome she had thought him, how eloquent, how superior in every way to her honest, plodding, duty-loving brother John—that man who wrote maudlin begging-letters, and loathed the wife he had married for her money!

It was only by degrees that Rachel had come to a true sense of the greatness of her deliverance. Betsy Briggs was harsh and grasping and ill-natured, but *he* had a base, crawling, creeping soul; a man with a grain of self-respect could never have written as he did to Bittersweet. He had made his cowardly cast for fortune and had lost all, present and future too; poverty is a vast temptation, that Rachel could allow, but she said to herself with a vehemence of disgust, that had she been in his place, she would have lain down to starve and die rather than degrade herself as he had done! She was sick of the thought of him, and wished his name might never sound in her ears more; but her devout aspiration was not to be realized.

II.

As Grace and Arthur Hill traveled southward again to their Devonshire rectory, they turned out of their road to go for a single day to Hastings, where Annis was now at home with the Oliver Warleighs. Grace's account of her written in full detail to Katherine was not either particularly cheering or very much the reverse. The apartments occupied by the Oliver Warleighs were pleasantly situated, she said, and the children had no stint of air and space; but she thought Annis looking pale; though this Lady Georgiana assured her was only the effect of the sunburn wearing off. She exhibited the child to her aunt equipped for a walk on the sands in a holland blouse, a bonnet and a blue *ugly*; her elfish locks had been clipped, and she looked admirably groomed, but the frisk and frolic of her nature were in a phase of permanent suppression. Lucy, who was herself well and contented, said her little charge was settling better than she expected, though she never dared lose sight of her for a single moment, lest she should try to run away—which did not look much like settling, thought Grace.

Lady Georgiana was so strict and methodical that a breach of her rules was hardly possible, but she was not actively unkind; and if children could thrive and be happy without any warmth of love her system would be a most prosperous one—but they can not any more than flowers can thrive without sunshine.

Oliver Warleigh apparently exercised no in-

fluence in his wife's domain. He found Hastings hot and dull, and longed for Paris, whither Sir Laurence was gone. What further course his travels would take was not known either there or in Hurdledale; but it was not anticipated that he would stay long amongst cities and civilization unless his change of health had induced also a thorough change of mind and mood. He had some idea of going to South America when he left home, but Katherine opined that he would not take himself very far away anywhere until he had full assurance that his little widdling was happy with her kinsfolks.

Neither did he. Annis had been at Hastings about a month when one afternoon while she was down on the sands with Lucy, her cousins and Salter their nurse, Sir Laurence was seen coming along toward them. Annis had dug a hole for the water to flow into which she called Hurtlemere, and was busy piling up the house a little way from it, working with fiery energy, unlike the other children, who lay basking in the sun, when Lucy cried out, "Look there, Miss Annis, who is this?" pointing at the same time to the swiftly advancing figure.

"Papa, papa!" cried Annis, and flung down her spade and rushed to meet him like the wind.

The nurses saw her taken up and fondly hugged, then carried down to the water's edge, and for an hour, while the tide was flowing in, there Sir Laurence paced with her in his arms, eagerly talking both, as if all the time before there were too short for the utterance of their mutual love. Presently he took off the child's sunshade, and her prim little bonnet, and ruffled up her short locks into some likeness of their former tangle; then set her down, withdrew a pace or two to look at her, and laughing aloud, snatched her up again, making quite merry over her funny appearance, as Lucy interpreted his gestures.

At last he brought her back to her nurse, saying that "Now he must go!"

"Where are you going, papa?" asked the piping voice and wistful eye.

He told her to look far away over the sea in the west and said, "There." She did not understand. He explained that he was going across the water in a big ship, and that as soon as he reached the land beyond he would send her a large letter written by himself to tell her all about his voyage, which Lucy must read to her.

"And I will write a large letter to you, papa," was the fond answer—poor little darling, still entangled in pothooks and hangers! Then there was a long, silent kiss and he left her, quite patient and submissive; that lesson she had learned perfectly already.

By this glimpse of his pretty gipsy at her play, Sir Laurence had satisfied himself that her body, at least, was not pining; Lucy's affectionate care had softened the worst asperities of the change, and he quitted her with a mind at ease. A few days afterward he sailed from Southampton in the design of a two years' adventure in South America. The effort of leaving Hurtlemere had more than repaid its pain; his fever, as Bittersweet premised, had routed out old melancholies, and reviving strength had driven them away; his brother Oliver and all who saw him at Hastings, reported that he looked as hale

and as cheerful as ever he did in his life. New air had given him new courage, and it was not without a keen sense of present enjoyment that he found himself once more on the sea, and on the way to a renewal of the free, wild existence in which he had been so well content before the short, beautiful dream of his life with Helena came and ended it.

III.

That summer seemed to Rachel Withers more long-drawn out than any previous summer since she came to Prior's Bank. Mrs. Sara Grandage did not make an annual practice of changing her quarters, and her goddaughter felt the want of variety; but variety was not what she was likely to have, for the older Bittersweet grew, the less she appeared to care for it.

One day in the latter summer, Katherine took her for a drive to Whinstane over the purple moors. Their purpose was to see Lady Foulis, and neither could perceive that she was any the worse for her last four or five years' wear. She was rather deaf perhaps, and her memory played her false sometimes; otherwise she was pretty much the same as when Katherine and Grace were married from the Tower. The visitors told her about Sir Laurence being gone on his travels again, and about Annis being left under the care of Oliver Warleigh and Lady Georgiana; to which last item of information she made one of her grotesque replicas.

"Send a wood-pigeon to be nurse-tended by a goshawk! What if it pyke out its eyes, you wise folk, you wary folk!" and then she wandered off to other topics more personal to herself, and recurred to the child no more.

These duty visits Katherine had paid to Lady Foulis twice annually since her marriage, but the weird old woman grew each time apparently more indifferent to them. How long life will linger and last in some human frames when worn utterly threadbare of joy, love, hope, interest! Lady Foulis was a miracle of passive endurance; it could not be said now that she *suffered*, but it would have seemed even less irksome to suffer than to vegetate in the trance of feeling that enthralled her.

"Why do you not go out into the sun now and then?" Katherine asked her. "The place is so overgrown and deserted now, that nobody would disturb you?"

Lady Foulis turned her face to the shining sky visible through the open window, and after gazing at it vacantly for a few minutes, said, "I have lost the use of my limbs," though they had seen her walk across the room not five minutes before.

Katherine told Rachel afterward that this was her invariable reply whenever, after Sir William's death, she was invited to take the air. "I have lost the use of my limbs." Whether she really fancied so, or whether she merely used the words in a figurative sense as expressing her determination never again to cross the threshold of her refuge, no one could tell. She did not appear uncheerful by any means, though she saw her visitors come without pleasure, and go without regret. Some day she would just lay her gray head down and die, and nobody would miss her; she would only be one ghost the less haunting Whinstane Tower.

Toward the end of August Lucy returned to

Hurtledale, and a fortnight later she took up her abode as mistress at the farm on which young Rohb had entered at Lady-Day. She looked fresh and blooming from her seaside sojourn. During her absence she had been at Everham, and had visited many former friends; but old Mrs. Gwynne, Helena's grandmother, was dead, and strangers were in possession of the house, where the violets grew in such sweet profusion under the breakfast-room window. Lucy's account of Annis was fair on the whole, and tallied with what Lady Georgiana wrote to Katherine. The child was no lover of literature, and after three months of steady teaching, she could not read words of four letters yet; but she grew and played, no one better. She was moody at first, but her dullness and ill-temper were off by degrees.

"It is a life that is like a strait-waistcoat to her after running wild at Hurtlemere; but it don't vex her now as much as it did," Lucy told Rachel Withers. "She is downright *obstinate*, that is what she is; if she takes a notion into her head, I defy any body either to scold or to coax it out of her again. She's very provoking, and she can't *abide* Lady Georgiana. Some people would spite her for it, but Lady Georgiana doesn't—she's always the same, and Miss Annis might just as well beat her head against a stone wall as think to put *her* past her patience. She is served just like her cousins; there is no difference made among 'em nor allowed. I can't say but they all behave very well to her—only Mr. Oliver he don't notice her much, and she runs out of his way whenever she sees him coming; for she's a queer suspicious little thing to them she takes against, and him she hated from first sight."

"And whom in the household does she love best?" Rachel inquired.

"I think it's Mactavish, an ugly Scotch dog that belongs to Master Mortimer," replied Lucy. "They are both odd in their tempers and might be something akin, as Salter says. It is the creature most like being at home to her, and that is the reason." Rachel asked further if Salter was kindly disposed toward her additional charge. "Salter is well paid, and has no reason to object to any thing," was the answer. "Before I came away, she got an under-nurse to help her, a girl I can speak for, a cousin of my own who lived at Everham. Salter's tongue's a bit rough at times, but she means nothing amiss. Miss Annis will take no harm from her."

"And how did she bear the parting from you, Lucy?" was the next interrogatory.

Lucy looked touched with a too-late compunction as she said: "Well, Miss Rachel, I was that coward of seeing her fret that I never told her, and wouldn't have her told. She'd miss me in the morning, and Salter would dress her instead, and so it would break on her that I was gone. She is grown used to them all now, and may be she wouldn't feel it so much as I was afraid she might—children have not such long memories as old folks. But I wish, now, I'd kissed the pretty darling good-by!"

IV.

For several months after his departure from England news of Sir Laurence Warleigh came

with strict regularity both to Hastings and to Hurtleale; but the November mails brought no letters to either, and there was a failure also in Mr. Bond's intelligence. Katherine was greatly disquieted, and carried her uneasiness to Rachel at Prior's Bank—what could Laurence's silence mean?

"I should imagine that it might easily be explained on the supposition that he has got beyond the regions of posts," said Mrs. Sara Grandage, who was in a sarcastic mood. "Most likely he is hunting alligators or bears on the top of the Skihi mountains—depend upon it he is in some mischief, but quite safe. Commend me to the women of this generation for worrying themselves about shadows and fancies."

The early December mails brought no letters again, and Mr. Bond being inconvenienced by his master's silence, came over to the rectory to consult Katherine about it; but she could only suggest Bittersweet's explanation or else the tediousness of writing letters.

"It must be very tiresome for a traveler to keep up a flow of domestic intelligence when he has betaken himself for a season to the ways and customs of savage life," she said; but though she *said* it, it neither relieved her own mind nor satisfied the steward's.

Waiting for news is weariful work, but when ill-news comes most of us would fain barter the pang of it for the aching expectancy that has culminated in the worst tidings that could have been brought us.

On the fifteenth of December there came to the rectory a letter from Oliver Warleigh, containing the intelligence that Sir Laurence was *dead*. He had started one day in company with another English gentleman, whose name was Carew, and attended by several natives, on an expedition into the forests, which was to last a week. They were in a very wild part of the country, and had to carry their provisions, tent, and other necessities with them. Four days beyond the stated time for their absence had elapsed, when Mr. Carew reappeared alone at the missionary station whence they had started, wounded, and almost worn out with hunger and fatigue. His story was that on the last day of their journey, when they were preparing for a return to the station, they were set upon by a party of savages, that their guide and servants fled, and that both Sir Laurence and himself were shot down. His wound, however, was trifling, and he made his escape after lying close for a few hours in the brushwood; but of Sir Laurence he had seen nothing from the moment he fell, and he believed him to be dead.

This account, written by Mr. Carew himself from the Catholic missionary station where he then lay ill, was inclosed in Oliver Warleigh's letter to John Withers and Katherine. It came upon them with the shock of a terrible and unexpected disaster—call it but a *rumor*, as Mr. Bond did, still it seemed to have a foundation in truth! Oliver believed it so fully that he had ordered Annis and all his household to be put into mourning forthwith; Katherine refused to do this *yet*—so long as there was uncertainty she determined to think there was hope. Mr. Carew did not say he had *seen* Sir Laurence

dead, but only that he *believed* him dead; it was a slender stay but she clung to it, and presently received some additional strength from an irregular source.

As soon as Mistress Dobie heard the fatal rumor, she went down to the rectory to see Katherine, protesting by all her superstitions that she did not believe the story one bit.

"If he'd been to die this year shouldn't we ha' seen th' White Hands hovering aboon him? They'd not fail o' th' sign, an' him the head o' the family too." Katherine murmured something in acquiescence. "Don't tell me o' Sir Laurence being dead, he's no more dead than I am!" the dame went on, emboldened by an encouragement that perhaps she did not expect; "if he'd been to die wouldn't he ha' gone off in the fever? but I knew he'd pull through and be stronger than ever. 'Cause why? the White Hands never appeared! He'd gotten a new lease o' life when he set off to them foreign parts, an' last words he spoke to me afore starting was that he felt more like himself again than he'd done for years."

When Mary Wray heard the tale she immediately cried, "Send for the bairn—I pray you, send for the bairn?"

But who was to send for her? Her uncle Oliver was her natural guardian if her father were, indeed, dead; and he had left her in his care, out of which *nobody* could take her. Then Lucy went to Katherine with tears on her pretty bridal face, saying, "Oh, Sir Laurence was the best master ever servant had, and the tenderest father to Miss Annis. They'll bring her home to Hurtleale now, won't they? They'll never leave her in Mr. Oliver's hands?"

These open evidences of distrust only served to intensify Katherine's anxieties, and her brother Oliver's unannounced arrival at the rectory two days after his letter complicated them still further. He was in a very nervous, excited state both of mind and body; physically he was not strong, and great agitations soon threw him altogether off his balance. Under these circumstances he was any thing but an acceptable guest amongst people already suffering and distressed. His object in his prompt descent on Hurtleale was to see the steward.

Mr. Bond was a cool and resolute man; he obeyed Oliver Warleigh's summons but he obeyed it leisurely, and behaved throughout the interview with great circumspection. He was determined to keep a tight hand over the powers that had been left with him, and said with entire respect but no doubtful decision, "Until I receive more positive information of Sir Laurence's death, than any that has come to us yet, Mr. Oliver, I shall continue to act as under his orders."

Oliver was exceedingly angry; he put on high and mighty airs; said the steward was presumptuous, though he was only faithful, and even went so far as to throw imputations on his motives. But Mr. Bond was too strong in his conscientious integrity to be moved by any thing of this sort, and though during the course of the next few days Oliver visited Penslaven, Whinstale, and Hurtleale, in Annis's interest, as he said, but really with the overseeing eye of a greedy master-expectant, he gained nothing by it—people did not even give him the title; a

trifling discourtesy, but one that stung him to the quick.

Much gossip flew about the dales during the old Christmas season when neighbors were circulating from house to house to make it merry. But at the rectory there was a cloud and at Prior's Bank too. One night when they were alone, Mrs. Sara Grandage and her goddaughter fell to talking all the circumstances of Sir Laurence's rumored death over; and Rachel, at length, appealed to the sagacious old lady to tell her candidly what she thought of them. Bittersweet wrinkled her brows and demurred to the comprehensive question — she had a reputation for wisdom which she was not inclined to pledge rashly in a case of such great moment.

"There is an air of probability about the story — an air of great probability," said she in her musing way, "but I should not be at all astonished to hear at any hour that Sir Laurence had turned up again, quite safe and sound. If I were in Oliver Warleigh's shoes, I should not make haste to kick them off and get into my brother's on the strength of the information we have at present. Bond is quite justified in keeping hold of every thing until he hears more. I wish, for my part, he had hold of Sir Laurence's daughter too!"

Further than this Bittersweet would not utter; but Rachel interpreted her oracle's words to mean as low a state of belief as her own and Katherine's.

Oliver Warleigh went over to Bristowe before returning home, and there he found the household had not been put into mourning any more than that at the rectory. He expressed violent displeasure, and Mrs. Damer Warleigh, in speaking to Katherine afterward, said his behavior was an exhibition most odious and painful to witness. No one had better reason to know this than Katherine herself. He lost his temper with every body who dared to suggest a doubt of his brother's death, and declared they were all fools together. The shock of joy, some people said, had been almost too much for his reason; and they were astonished that Lady Georgiana, who was better versed than most women in the art of taking things coolly, had not warned him against the ill-appearance his exuberance would have in the eyes of the censorious world. It was an exceeding relief to all at the rectory when, after a week of worry and wretchedness, he took his way southward once more.

By the next ship that sailed for the port whither Sir Laurence had gone just six months before, Mr. Bond's eldest son, a shrewd young lawyer's clerk of five-and-twenty, set out with plenary powers to investigate, on behalf of Katherine and John, the report that had been sent home of his death. Oliver denounced the measure as quite needless, and Grace Hill, who had taken the sad story on the darkest side, hoped from it no good results. But until this was done, Mr. Bond refused to yield up one iota of his master's property or his own authority into other hands, and Katherine equally refused to put on black for her brother.

V.

It seemed like disaster upon disaster! Three days after Oliver Warleigh went back to Has-

tings, there came to Katherine a letter from Lady Georgiana apprising her that the scarlet fever in its worst form had broken out in her nursery. The nursemaid, Lucy's cousin, was the first to sicken, then Mortimer, and now little Annis. The two other children had been sent out of the way as soon as the disease declared itself.

Katherine instantly became impatient to go to the assistance and comfort of her sister-in-law; but this Dr. Beane expressly forbade for the sake of her own darlings. Then Rachel Withers proposed to make the journey, but neither would her godmamma allow her to encounter the risk. "What good could you do?" she asked, when Rachel became very urgent. "You are not used to children, still less to sick children and would be far more of a trouble than of a help if you did go." Lucy Robb would have undertaken the mission, but her husband refused to hear of it, and as for poor Mary Wray, she had never been out of the dales in her life. There was nothing for it but to wait the turn of events.

Each morning's post was watched for anxiously. The next letter—rather long delayed—was from Oliver: he said Mortimer had the fever the most violently—Annis the least so. He made some mysterious allusion to further intelligence from abroad, substantiating the report of his brother's death, but entered into no particulars on the score of Kate's unwillingness to be convinced of an event so deplorable. One thing was evident to all — Oliver himself credited it, and Lady Georgiana also fully credited it; they were as firmly persuaded in their own minds that Sir Laurence was dead as they were of their own existence in the body. Bittersweet made a remark that startled Rachel as she was recounting to her the contents of this letter.

"Whether Sir Laurence be dead or not, the belief of it has taken *dangerous* root in Oliver's mind," she said, and their eyes met.

Rachel felt her color come and go, and her pulse quicken. What did her godmamma mean to insinuate? She did not dare ask her, and her own thoughts were too dark to be told. Whence came her suspicions and her fears? She did not go in search of them. Were they sent to her for warnings? she asked in the air.

The day after this letter of Oliver's was received at the rectory, Lucy carried one thither which she had just had from Salter, the respectable nurse who was her fellow-servant at Hastings. She was no longer with Lady Georgiana's children, but with a family in London. She had heard of her former charge's illness, and now wrote to Lucy about it, telling her that she had been discharged from her situation at the time news came of Sir Laurence Warleigh's death, on the plea that she exercised favoritism in the nursery to the prejudice of Annis. "But," said she, in her letter, "so far was I from slighting her that I stood up for her many a time and oft. For after you was gone, Lucy, she had sharp work of it with her book and Lady Georgiana, and fretted her little heart so that it quite pined one to see her. She was dull, and I don't think a day went over her head that she was not either stood in the corner with her face to the wall, or else shut up in the dark closet; and that she could not bear, her

spirit was so high. I spoke my mind about it, and Lady Georgiana gave me my discharge, and a month's wage without any warning. She got Mrs. Lupton, who was her maid in her first husband's time, to come temporary while she found somebody in my place. If she is there now, the children will not be tended badly, for she is a clever nurse, though I always thought her a spiteful, proud thing. But I wish you was there, or else me, on account of poor Miss Annis. She ought to be put in Chancery, to be took care of if her papa is dead—it would be safer. One has heard tell of strange things, but I say naught."

Though Salter said *naught* she said quite enough to increase every body's distress on the child's account; her letter was detained and shown to Mr. Bond. "I'll just go over to Hastings and see how things are," suggested he; and he started by that night's mail, reaching his destination by the middle of the next day.

VI.

But he was too late. He was met at the door with the intelligence that Annis was *dead*.

Oliver Warleigh was in the act of inditing a letter to Katherine with the pitiful tidings when the steward was ushered into his presence. He looked desperately nervous and ill; said he could not live through such a period of anxiety again; wished a thousand times he had never undertaken the care of his brother's child; and then Lady Georgiana entered, grave and stately, and relieved him from the strain of conversation.

Her husband left the room, and she bore the brunt of all the questions Mr. Bond chose to put to her, replying to them with an air of candid precision. Annis had struggled against the fever successfully at first: they had better hopes for her than for Mortimer; but all at once she sank, and never rallying again, died about ten o'clock the night before.

Mr. Bond saw Mortimer—a wan little skeleton in his bed, for he was recovering; but he did not see Annis. He was one of those persons who shrink from beholding the dead. For a moment he thought he *must*, he *ought*—that no one would be satisfied in Hurtledeale unless he did; but Lady Georgiana made no suggestion of the propriety of his doing so, and he was thankful to escape the necessity.

The following day he visited Lady Georgiana again, and arranged with her that the corpse should be carried to Hurtledeale for interment. "Annis must be laid beside her mother; if Sir Laurence were at home, I am sure that is what he would wish," said he. And Oliver Warleigh after some demur acceded to it.

At the same time as the steward was making these last arrangements at Hastings, his letter and Oliver's containing the bitter news were being read at the rectory with many tears and useless regrets. Before the day was done the intelligence had flown through the dale, and the hazardous tongues of all the gossips were unloosed.

"Has the bairn had fair play, Miss Rachel?" asked Mary Wray, putting into words the doubt that had visited unbidden many minds besides hers. "Has the bairn had fair play, think ye?"

Bittersweet stared into the fire and said nothing;

but there was a world of silent meaning in her face. Rachel only shook her head, and remarked that it was a very fatal fever. Lucy Robb just cried and reiterated that it could not be true—she would not believe it; but realizing it by degrees, she sobbed, "Oh! if I'd been there she'd never have died! She was like dear Miss Helena—she broke her heart amongst strangers; it was that killed her more than the fever."

The rector, the tenants, and all the persons in Sir Laurence Warleigh's employment met the coffin when it arrived at Brafferton in charge of Oliver and Mr. Bond. Hearses and mourning-coaches were in readiness, and the funeral proceeded through six miles of stormy weather over the moor straight to Hurtledeale churchyard. Here were assembled in the wind and the sleet, Katherine and her children, Rachel, Mrs. Damer Warleigh and the Squire, Mary Wray, and Lucy Robb, and all the cottage and farmer-folk from far and near. It was a scene long remembered in the dale.

The impression the child's death had created was very painful. She was neglected—she did not get fair play—she was wanted out of the world—this and much more to a similar effect went floating about amongst the gossips. Oliver Warleigh looked wretchedly ill, and after resting a single night at the rectory, he went home again. Katherine and he could not talk the calamity over together—indeed she scarcely saw him. Mrs. Sara Grandage spared Rachel for a week to be with her sister-in-law, and her presence was a great comfort. Grace Hill wrote in a mood of sorrowful reproach, "If the poor darling had come to me, this would not have happened—we have no fever here." And every body who had lent a voice in favor of sending Annis to Lady Georgiana now felt a load of self-rebuke, which it was not easy to reason away with the reflection that they had acted for the best.

When Rachel returned to Prior's Bank the first thing Bittersweet said was, "See here, Rachel," and offered her the supplement of *The Times*, pointing to the notice in the obituary of Annis's death, followed immediately by that of Sir Laurence, which in reluctant deference to Katherine's wishes, Oliver had hitherto refrained from publishing. "Cheerful, is it not?" added the old lady dryly. "*The Times* flies all the world over; and he may see it alive and well in the body! What a shock for him about his little wildling! Of this, Rachel, I am persuaded—had there not come to England this story of her father's death, Annis would be above ground this day."

And Rachel in her secret heart thought so too; but it was an awful assertion to make, and it would have been a still more awful assertion to prove.

People now began to ask who was to hinder Oliver Warleigh from entering on the enjoyment of his brother's wealth and title? Annis was out of the way—*out of the way!* An expressive phrase—How often had he wished her out of the way before Heaven took her? asked many a cynical tongue. Rumors and fears of change began to harass tenants and servants. Sir Laurence had been a generous landlord and an easy master, while every body's experience of Oliver

predicted the reverse. The Dobies looked for notice to quit the Hurltemere House, and Mary Wray and her husband expected that they would either have to leave the Force Farm or to pay their rent dues like other tenants; for Sir Laurence had given them no bond to secure them in its free occupancy, and word of mouth testimony was not likely to go far with such a stickler for his rights as Oliver.

His rights! Every soul in Whinstandale devoutly prayed that he might never establish any rights over them, and waited as anxiously for young Mr. Bond's report of Sir Laurence as did any amongst his kinsfolk, at the rectory or elsewhere.

CHAPTER THE FOURTH.

UNDER COVER OF NIGHT.

I.

I WOULD not have such a heart in my bosom
For the dignity of the whole body.

SHAKESPEARE.

WE must now return to the day when Mr. Carew's letter with the tidings of Sir Laurence's death reached Oliver Warleigh at Hastings. That night he shut himself in his study alone—no, in company with his evil thoughts, which kept muttering over and over in his heart with a deafening persistence, "Laurence is dead—*Laurence is dead*; and there is only that little brown brat of his Catholic wife's between me and Whinstandale. *I wish she were in heaven!*" A devout prayer than that never fathomed hell.

By and by he brought out an old plan of the Penslaven and Whinstane estates, which he had drawn when he was living at the Tower in Sir William's lifetime; he gloated over it, reckoned up the rentals and devised how he would raise them when they became his.

To him in this mood came Lady Georgiana; saw what he was doing, saw into his mind, and said, cold and scornful, "What is the profit of it, Oliver? Yours is the barren title, all else is the child's."

Then his secret thought took words and clothed itself. "Who knows?" said he. "I wish she were in heaven!" Lady Georgiana glanced round alarmed and bade him hush! And for the next five minutes they stood facing each other, but silent; and fearful as two conspirators in whose mind a bad plot is germinating.

The next morning Salter gave Lady Georgiana a pretext for discharging her; she took her wages, packed up her belongings, and departed the same evening. She was no sooner out of the house than Mrs. Lupton entered it; a fair, sleek, well-flavored woman about forty years of age—precisely the sort of woman to look at, whom mothers would feel confidence in placing about their children. She had Lady Georgiana's entire confidence. On the second day from the arrival of the letter Oliver Warleigh made a journey to Hurltemere, and returned in a week to find every thing precisely as he left it. He was not satisfied; he was very much excited—he did not like Mrs. Lupton, and wished she were out of the house. Nevertheless Mrs. Lupton staid.

"It is not safe to *make* opportunities, Oliver, we must *wait* for them," whispered Lady Georgiana.

Oliver Warleigh betook himself to Eastbourne for quiet, but was recalled the following day by the news that the little nurse and Mortimer were ill. He loved his children and hastened home—perhaps a judgment was at hand and not a fortune! The next night as he sat brooding in his study over that plan of the estate his wife came to him again. "Lupton thinks Annis also is sickening for the fever," said she, peevishly.

"Let her sicken—I wish she were in heaven!" hissed Oliver, a grin of white-hot eagerness convulsing his face.

Lady Georgiana seated herself in front of her husband, and when he repeated his aspirations she said, "Amen," sarcastically, but warned him to be cautious and speak low.

"Are you in jest or in earnest?—it is almost too good news to be true," said he, trembling all over.

"In earnest—her symptoms are precisely the same as Mortimer's but more acute; shall we write and tell them in Hurltemere? We *must*," Oliver admitted the necessity.

A noise at the door disturbed them; but it was only Lupton, and she came in. "What do you think of Miss Annis, Lupton?" her master asked as she entered, and shut the door behind her.

"I think she is going to be very ill, sir."

"Do you, indeed?"

"Not a doubt of it, sir. It will go harder with her than with Master Mortimer."

"The fever will have its natural course," this with an acquiescent sigh.

"It will, sir." Then turning to Lady Georgiana she said, "Would your ladyship be pleased to call in a physician for Miss Annis? Under the circumstances perhaps it would be well—not that I presume to advise; but Dr. Frith might see her. I can recommend him from experience in children's cases."

"Why, the fellow's an arrant quack!" interposed Oliver Warleigh hastily.

Mrs. Lupton gave him a glance of superlative contempt, but Lady Georgiana answered her as if he had never spoken.

"Yes, Lupton, send for Dr. Frith. I am quite satisfied with Mr. Blunt for Mortimer and little Jane, but I agree with you that under the circumstances, a physician must attend Miss Annis."

A singular expression crossed Mrs. Lupton's smooth features, but courtesying in silent respect, she modestly veiled her eyes before her master's uneasy, inquiring scrutiny, and went out.

For a few minutes after they were left alone, Oliver Warleigh and his wife maintained a dead silence. It was a peculiarly still night out of doors; the wind was still and the sea was still; there was no sound to break the hush in the room except the rustle and tinkle of the fire in the grate which was dying down amongst white wood embers. Lady Georgiana was a woman who had a vein of irony in the dull metal of her composition. She ended the dismal quiet by saying with a slow sneer, "One might think that *somebody* was helping us, Oliver."

"Are you sure of that woman?" he asked

suspiciously, passing by his wife's uncanny jest.

"She is an excellent nurse; we may safely leave the children to her," was the ambiguous reply.

"But what is this Dr. Frith for? a low fellow—I do not exactly see what it means."

"Dr. Frith is to attend Annis instead of Mr. Blunt. Perhaps it is not necessary that you should exactly see."

The conversation dropped for that night. The next and the next after that went over, and there was no more allusion to the desperate wishes primed to produced their guilty fruit. No one had come from Hurtleale and the—*well*,—the devil had it all his own way with them at Hastings.

On the fifth night from Annis's sickening Lady Georgiana stood in a light closet adjoining the room where the child lay burning and tossing and moaning in the height of her fever.

"How will she wear through the crisis?" asked she presently of the nurse—her own child had weathered it bravely, and was on the turn to recover.

"I don't think she will get through it, my lady—she *need* not," was Lupton's answer, given with a sidelong look at her mistress's pale face. Lady Georgiana sighed, but she went to her husband exultant.

Oliver was in a qualmish mood.

"I—I will not have any thing that is not *safe*," stammered he with the very guilt of murder in his face. His wife looked at him long and steadily. "I *mean* it," he added; on which she went away from him without a word, and spoke again with Mrs. Lupton.

"If she stood between *me* and *money*, she should not live," said the nurse; and she muttered something more to herself about men being cowards, and never knowing their own minds.

But Annis passed through the crisis safely, and opened her wan eyes on the faces round her bed again with a clear recollection of each.

II.

One night something more than a week after this, the child lay white and weary on her bed of pain—longing for Lucy, longing for Salter, mightily afraid in her heart of that broad-faced woman who had replaced the latter. The night-light had burnt low and flung grotesque, flitting shadows on the walls, as the flame rose and fell in the socket. Annis was dimly wide awake, and pathetically miserable. She had been a long while alone—ever since six o'clock when Lupton gave her tea, and now she heard it striking eight by the time-piece in the hall. She had said "Gentle Jesus," three times over, and was thinking of beginning again when the nurse entered, fully equipped for out-of-doors, and bade her peremptorily get up. Annis did not at first quite understand her; she was very wan and weak from her fever, and had never been dressed yet; but when she saw Mrs. Lupton taking from a drawer her bonnet and frock and underclothing, she sat up and watched; and at a second command slipped out upon the floor.

She neither whimpered nor questioned; every morsel of flesh upon her bones quiveringly acknowledged her dread of this sleek, soft-voiced woman. She detested her aunt Georgiana, but

she did not fear her as she feared this nurse, who yet had done nothing but take care of her. As Lupton's hands moved swiftly to and fro in clothing her, she trembled from head to foot, and she was literally palsied with agony, when, after having tied a thick woolen veil over her face so that she could neither see nor be seen, the nurse took her up in her arms, and looking out first to note if the stairs were clear, descended to the hall where the house-door was opened for her and reclosed without a sound.

It was a very cold and blustering night, and they met the wind full in front, which perhaps helped to preserve Annis's consciousness; but Mrs. Lupton presently struck down a narrow side-street where the height of the houses sheltered them. She walked to the end of it, then turned on her steps and turned again some dozen times or more as if waiting for other persons. Those she expected came up as the clock in a house close by struck nine—a man and a woman to whom she spoke angrily.

"You are later than I expected—I have been here twenty minutes. The train goes in half an hour and the boat from London-bridge at six. You have no time to lose now, for you must be off to-night. Which of you will carry her? She is a light weight enough."

"Give her to me," said the woman; and Annis found herself transferred to a stranger who held her by no means so firmly as Lupton. A great terror was upon her; she would have cried aloud, but her voice died strangled in her throat.

There was no more conversation; the nurse walked briskly away, her "good-night" sounding a long way off to the child's half-stunned senses; and then the woman who carried her, turned with her companion in an opposite direction, swiftly and silently. On coming to a wider thoroughfare, they called a cab from a stand, and got into it, bidding the driver take them to the station, and adding some remark about their luggage having gone on before. They did not look like persons who would be embarrassed with much luggage, but the man had a carpet-bag in his hand. If any of the quiet Hurtleale folk could have peered into the cab and seen the faces of Annis's new guardians, they would have recognized in spite of all their soiled weeds of poverty and decay, their brilliant old acquaintances Mr. and Mrs. Gilsland!

The next day, while Annis was being carried across the Channel and forwarded to some safe concealment in Paris, Mr. Bond made his appearance at Hastings. Nothing, as Lady Georgiana and Lupton agreed, could have fallen out more conveniently—a few hours earlier would have spoiled their plot. Even if he had desired to see the child they were ready with a sufficient plea against it; but he did not—his nervous aversion to the sight of death helped them even there.

Who is it makes opportunities for those who want to do bad deeds? They are never far to seek, and help to profit by them never seems lacking either. Lady Georgiana sardonically acknowledged that *somebody* had aided them, and vexed her husband by her expressions of ironical gratitude. He did not relish his wife's grim humor. He was too much of a coward; he feared man, God, and the devil, but man the most; for though he had the cunning to devise

wickedness, and the greed to covet the Dead-Sea fruit of crime, he found no stomach for it when it was plucked. He sat at the feast like a panic-stricken wretch with a sword dangling above his head, and suspecting poison in every dish. Having planned this abduction of Annis and connived at the doing of it, fear came upon him horribly. Not a double of his guilt, not a twist, but his own williness could have followed it out and detected it in any other sinner. He went through the drama of her funeral like a man in a trance, and when he got safely back to Lady Georgiana, he shut himself up for several days, the most abject, despicable victim that ever fell before temptation, and then groveled before the dread of being found out.

To Mrs. Lupton, whose nerves were of steel, he was a very curious study, but she said to her mistress, doubtfully,—

"He ought not to have been in it—no secret is safe with him. We may get into trouble yet."

"Leave him to me," responded Lady Georgiana. "When the funeral was over the worst danger was over. He will come to himself by and by, and be firmer than you anticipate. But we must keep excitement away from him. Those people we have used need not trouble us in person; if we find the means you will manage them. It was a hard bargain they drove with us, but you did your best."

"Consider the stake and the risk. But it is done and *it shall be done*. I never put my hand to a thing yet that I did not make an end. By this time they are all safe in Paris; and there may they stay! It would make it surer for all of us if one of them never came back.

III.

The next day but one after her abduction, Annis woke up in the cold early morning to find herself in a large room, bare except for a lumber of boxes and disused furniture piled against the walls—an utterly naked, foul and comfortless garret in an old house of the Luxembourg quarter in Paris. Her bed was a chaff mattress laid on a wooden frame, too large for it by half its breadth; and her covering was so insufficient that twenty times during the past night she had roused up shivering, then dropped uneasily to sleep again.

There were two windows in the room, both heavily barred and crusted with dirt, and the house was surrounded on every side by other high houses similar to itself. Annis rose and looked out for a few minutes in the pale dawn, then covered back to her bed, and lay wakeful and fretful for a long while before any body came near her.

It was past ten o'clock when Mrs. Gilsland appeared, bringing her coffee and a hunch of bread; after eating part of which she was again left to herself. About noon the sun struck against the darkened windows and gave her courage to get up and feebly put on some of her clothing. Then with her little frock drawn hood-fashion over her head, she crouched in the window seat, pressed her face to the glass, and peering up at the frosty sky—the only familiar thing her eyes could see—she cried for "Papa, oh, dear papa!" until she was sick and weary with crying.

The frock she wore was black. They had

told her papa was dead when it was first put on, and she was never more to look for his return, but she had not realized it then, and when the fever smote her it went clean out of her mind. His name was ofttest on her lips in her delirium, and he was the only person upon whose help she called now. She had some vague sense of his being near her, but it did not comfort her much. Her mind was half wandering, and she was soon cold and hungry again. But hungry or not, no second meal came to her until night was drawing in. Then Mrs. Gilsland brought her bread and coffee again, after which she was put into her wretched bed, and the key of the room door turned upon her as her jailer went out.

If to solitude and darkness had been added the terrors they have for some children, Annis must have lost her wits: but she was not old enough, perhaps, to feel them. She said "Gentle Jesus," and then, mercifully, fell asleep.

Weeks and months went over her head in this secret place. When Mrs. Gilsland was in a worse temper than usual she beat her, but Annis had not for this querulous, red-nosed woman the agony of terror she had experienced when in the hands of Mrs. Lupton. Mrs. Gilsland cried almost as much and as often as herself; especially she cried when the tall shabby man who was her master, got into a rage and threatened and cursed, as he always did when he came to look at Annis in her captivity. Neither of them was allowed to go out. Once only did Annis feel the sun and fresh air, and that was by stealth when the trees in the Luxembourg gardens were beginning to bud. Mrs. Gilsland took her abroad on this occasion, but the walk was never repeated.

After that her guardians quarreled over her more than ever, but she had ceased to heed them much. By this time cold, neglect, and semi-starvation had done their cruel work on her; dulled her mind, enfeebled her body; made of her a poor, forlorn, haggard little waif that nobody could have recognized as Sir Laurence Warleigh's bonnie wildling. She had forgotten her long ballads, she had forgotten her own name and answered to that of *Alice*; she had forgotten every thing but "Gentle Jesus," and dear papa; and sometimes her head ached so that it felt as if they were drifting and fading out of it too. And when the April sunshine made its way into her hideous garret, the pitiful face it shone on was merry little gipsy's no longer, but a specter of poverty such as haunts the frozen streets of cities and makes unaccustomed strangers start at sight of childhood so little childlike, so little human!

IV.

The primroses were just coming into bloom at Prior's Bank, when one morning as Rachel Withers was taking a turn round the wild-flower walk after breakfast, she saw her brother John crossing the lawn and waving above his head what in form and substance appeared to be a letter. She ran to meet him.

"From Sir Laurence!" cried he, and the next moment he was telling her all how and about it, but in such a confused joy and hurry that it was some time before her understanding could get at the real facts of the case. She never in her

life before remembered to have seen John so carried away by any feeling of delight as he was then; if men wept when they were glad as women do he would certainly have broken down.

At last Rachel got the letter into her own hands to read, and then she found from its date that it had been penned just seven weeks later than the writer's supposed death, and while he was still a prisoner, gaunt, weak and suffering from a gunshot wound which had nearly cost him a limb. Mr. Carew's story had been true as far as it went, but it did not go far enough. Sir Laurence had been badly wounded and abandoned by all his companions, but when the marauding party of savages were gone with their spoils, one of the guides crept back to the place where he saw his master fall, and found him still alive. They made their way to the haunts of civilization through as many difficulties and privations as Mr. Carew himself had done, but at the time of his writing Sir Laurence was so far on the road toward recovery that he hoped soon to be able to travel again. For a fuller view of the scene of his adventures than he could give her in the compass of a letter, he referred Katherine to Humboldt's journey on the Orinoco. He had not at this date seen young Mr. Bond, nor heard of his little wildling's loss, and the letter was full of tender allusions to her which brought the tears into Rachel's eyes as she read them. By this time the little grave beside Helena's was green, and Dicky and merry Andrew hushed their voices when they approached the spot where they were told cousin Annis was lying.

Hurtledale and Whinstandale rang their loud-est chimes when the news came that Sir Laurence was alive and well, and in joy of it almost forgot the pitiful spectacle of his darling's funeral winding through the Christmas storm over the moor. But her foster-mother still kept her memory dear, and whenever she had the opportunity of a gossip with Mistress Dobie dilated on her first text of "had the bairn fair play?" And Mistress Dobie would respond that she could not make it out at all—the White Hands had never blessed her before she went away; so that between love and mystery the little gipsy's story was likely to live amongst the Chronicles of Hurtledale until time and the hour brought round their revenges, and set her once more in her rightful place.

v.

Sir Laurence Warleigh's letter was received at the rectory on a Thursday morning, and the next day it was laid on his brother Oliver's breakfast-table at Hastings, inclosed in one from John Withers.

"A double letter from Hurtledale," said Oliver, and broke the seal. At sight of the contents a bitter oath broke from his white lips, and Lady Georgiana understood the whole case in a moment.

"Be still, Oliver," said she, and fixed her eyes on him with steady, controlling power.

"It was *your* doing; I would never have allowed it but for you and that cursed Lupton," stammered he.

"You are a coward, Oliver; but even a coward can keep counsel from fear, and that is what *you* must do," said his wife, with firm,

cold scorn. He cowered under her eyes, but in his desperation he defied her.

"No, I shall tell Laurence; I shall tell him," gasped he; "I was never afraid of Laurence. He has come to life again—who the devil would have thought it? Oh! what a fool I have been to let you women get me into this scrape! I always said you were in too great haste; they did not believe in Hurtledale that he was dead. What have you done with the child? Tell me—I *will* know." To this outbreak Lady Georgiana opposed only a contemptuous silence. He spoke again. "She shall be restored to him—we will get out of the way and send her to Kate. Then he shall be told."

Lady Georgiana was compelled to decide upon her course on the spur of the moment. She had no scruples about deceiving her husband, since he was bent on her ruin and his own; and with a quiet, unmoved countenance she replied, "She can not be restored to him; for she is dead." Oliver glared at his wife, but it never occurred to him to doubt her word—indeed, why should she lie to *him*?

"Dead—how did she die? Was it murder?" he asked under his breath.

"No, it was not murder, but it would look like it if it came out—she died of a relapse of the fever as soon as they reached Paris. But all you have to know is that she died *here*—by the visitation of God, in the common course of nature, or what you will. Do not pry into particulars—you know more already than you can bear. Nothing can be undone that is done; you can not give her back to Laurence, therefore why drag down your children and me and yourself to perdition by a dozen idle words? Any poltroon can hold his tongue."

His paroxysm over, Oliver Warleigh agreed that silence was the safest policy. "But we will get out of the way before Laurence comes home," suggested he, still trembling and sore afraid. His personal security was now his first thought; profit from what had been done he was incapable of enjoying; indeed, there was no profit. Since Sir Laurence was alive and Annis dead, even the thousand a year his brother was to give him with her was gone.

"We will go back and live in Paris," said Lady Georgiana.

"But *they* are there," muttered he, meaning the Gilslands. His wife said they need not remain if they were, but she believed they had left. In fact, she knew nothing of their whereabouts at all; she trusted details to Lupton, who was more apt at managing them than herself. She had almost succeeded in persuading herself that the child was lost sight of forever. But if Oliver objected to Paris, they would try Brussels.

They tried Brussels accordingly, but did not like it, and early in April they had established themselves in Paris. The Gilslands had received warning through Lupton by this time that they must either keep close quarters or change them; for it had been found necessary to hoodwink Oliver Warleigh into a belief that the child actually was dead. But during that single walk which Annis took with Mrs. Gilsland by stealth when the trees were budding in the Luxembourg Gardens, she saw her uncle and

knew him. He caught a glimpse of her too, and told his wife afterward that he had met either the child or her ghost; but she laughed him out of the idea.

After that Annis was kept a strict prisoner, and Mr. Gilsland and his wife had serious differences of opinion about her. They knew then that Sir Laurence Warleigh was alive and well again, and Mrs. Gilsland was for revealing all the plot to him, and throwing themselves on his mercy for the consequences. She loathed her task of jailer; she was herself as much a captive and more wretched than the child; the days when she lived in the odor of respectability and poverty were paradise by comparison with her present life; and she would have done and endured almost any thing to escape from it.

Nature had not planned Betsy Briggs on the criminal mold; but she had fallen into hands where she was helpless. The money gone, Mr. Gilsland was master and she the tool. He was well clothed and fed now, and looked like a clergyman out on a holiday, seen in the streets alone. Far-sighted enough to know that any exposure of the part he had taken in the abduction of Annis must sink him forever, he determined to abide by the results of what he had done for the present. As a last desperate step they could but tell all—and it would never be too late. So long as Oliver Warleigh and his wife were true to their side of the bargain, he would be true to his; and meanwhile Sir Laurence's little wildling was Alice Gilsland—his niece, the orphan daughter of a dissipated brother of his own who had died of drinking, vice and destitution in Paris. A tale easy to tell, a drama easy to sustain, if they could only keep her out of sight of friendly faces until lapse of time had obliterated them from her memory, and changed her also beyond risk of recognition.

Mr. Gilsland's will prevailed over his wife's, and she gradually resigned herself to the adoption of her part in the play. The sharp pinch of necessity was withdrawn, and they were in a position again to appear in society—that is, in a society where they were not known; and after Lupton had seen the child by stealth, and pronounced her sufficiently altered to answer the purpose of the plot, they received permission to return to England, and push their fortunes if they could. With money in his pocket, a good appearance and a fluent tongue, there was little doubt but that Mr. Gilsland would be able to do it in a fashion. He had given up dreaming of honor and reputation now, and had only to make shift how to live.

CHAPTER THE FIFTH.

IN PARIS.

INFECTED minds
To their deaf pillows will discharge their secrets.

I.

It was just four years since Rachel Withers began to make her home at Prior's Bank; four years that had been spent in that serene monotony of ease which is sure, sooner or later, to conduce to apathy of spirits and stagnation of mind; and one morning Bittersweet addressed

her with the uncomplimentary remark that she was afraid that she was growing *stupid*. She answered that there really was nothing to talk about—all their subjects were worn threadbare, from the troubles of the Warleighs to the catastrophe of the last new novel.

"You are right—there is nothing," responded her godmamma, who was feeling particularly well and vivacious at the moment. "It is a great shame that we should settle down into dornice at our time of life—I am only sixty-six, and you are less than half my age. Rachel, we'll go to Paris, and see a bit of the world!"

Rachel's first impulse was to remonstrate, dearly as she would have enjoyed it. Was Bittersweet equal to it?

"Equal to it! don't be insinuating; I am equal to any thing. I have not been there for twenty years, and it has all been ground new again since my day. I knew it, my dear, half a century ago, when the Revolution reigned and Terror was king!"

Mrs. Sara Grandage settled it, and she and Rachel set out in May, backed by the advice and good wishes of all their friends, taking with them Clip, the invaluable, and Hanson the maid; but no sooner had they reached Amiens than they were laid fast by the heels, Bittersweet having contrived to fulfill all her goddaughter's worst anticipations by falling ill of the fatigues of the journey.

To be laid up at home is not altogether miserable; the house is kept still, every body goes softly, every body is at the invalid's service, and there are kind inquirers from without, whose coming breaks the dreary length of day; but to be laid up at an inn is very different. Still Bittersweet was a model for sick folks. They had been at Amiens just one week, and she had never left her bed for an hour, yet she had never lost her spirits for an hour either.

"It is nothing—I am not ill," she persisted. "I am like the babies, and shall sleep myself sound again; and I won't have any of your ridiculous French doctors brought near me!"

None of those in her train dared do otherwise than look cheerful and seem to enjoy themselves; but they were often anxious out of her sight. Clip went round the town watching and wondering over the process by which the streets were paved with asphalt, big bubbling caldrons of which were standing about in every thoroughfare; and though he had no conversational French worth mentioning, he still contrived to enter into one-sided arguments, from which he always came off triumphant, with any workman who could be prevailed on to listen to him. Hanson took refuge in the infinite tucks of a new petticoat, and as her mistress peremptorily forbade them to be dull, Rachel and she relieved each other in her room by turns, and brought her detailed accounts of their out-door wanderings.

Amiens is a pleasant old town, and the weather was so cool, clear and sunny, that it was looking its very best. Rachel discovered several agreeable walks, but her main attraction was always the cathedral. One morning she breakfasted very early, for there was a confirmation, and she wished to see it; but when she got there, the nave was half filled with the

children who had already come in ; the girls all in white, with bouquets, wreaths of flowers, and long veils covering them from head to foot ; the boys, little miniature men, in small, high-shouldered coats and hats, and carrying nosegays like their sisters.

Rachel was easily pleased, and she thought it a pretty sight to watch the country curés from the surrounding villages appear leading their primitive flocks ; though poor-looking, thin, anxious-visaged men some of them were. She made friends with an old countrywoman, who was delighted to show her which detachment was her *pays*, and to point out *her curé*—evidently a much revered and beloved person. He was a lean, elderly man, in a very rusty bombazine cassock, and with a weather, work-worn face. She liked, too, to see the Sisters of Charity arrive in charge of the poor schools ; it looked kind and comfortable.

The service was lengthy, and it was only about half over, when, as Rachel was standing near the great door, there entered an English clergyman, whom she instantly recognized as Mr. Gilsland, though he was changed much for the worse since he left Hurdendale. He circulated about amongst the throng for a quarter of an hour with leisured curiosity, and Rachel was very far indeed from desiring to attract his attention, when, in peering about in his old, short-sighted way, he at length caught her eye, started visibly, and turned clay-white in the face. Why should the man change color because of her ? she thought, and stiffly inclined her head as he made a sudden move toward the spot where she was stationed. She feared he was coming to speak to her, but instead he veered round, rushed to the door, and disappeared. Rachel was not sorry to be avoided—though why avoided so abruptly she did not know ; judging by externals, Mr. Gilsland's circumstances were more prosperous than when they last heard of him at Prior's Bank. When she got back to the inn, Bittersweet received her with the agreeable intelligence that *her friends* the Gilslands were there.

"Hanson saw them drive up in the omnibus," said she ; "and they have a wretched little girl in black with them—one of the miserable private pupils they have contrived to pick up most likely. Don't you pity her, Rachel ?" Rachel replied in a general way that her lines had certainly not fallen in pleasant places ; as the lines of children deprived of parental care but very rarely do.

Hanson, who was a woman of an inquiring turn of mind, esteemed it a part of her duty to gather up all sorts of little crumbs of gossip for the refection of her mistress, especially now that she was unable to forage for herself ; and the same afternoon she was in a position to say that she had seen Mrs. Gilsland, who looked in very poor health, and also that she had found out who the child in black was ; namely, a niece of Mr. Gilsland's, whom they were carrying home, her father being recently dead, and she having no mother. "And, poor little soul, it would may be be a mercy for her, if she were dead too," added the maid pathetically.

Rachel did not remember hearing that Mr. Gilsland had any married brother or sister, or

any brother or sister at all, but she knew that gossip intelligence is not particular to a shade or two of relationship ; and she said that it was a sign of his growth in charity if he had adopted the poor little orphan into his care. Rachel never could persuade herself to think the worst of any body—she always liked to find one white spot in the darkest disposition.

The next morning, before any of Mrs. Sara Grandage's party were astir, the Gilslands left Amiens, and very much surprised she was that her old friend Betsy Briggs had made no effort to see her.

"You don't mean to say that the woman has gone without paying her respects to me when she knew I was in the hotel ?" cried she, in undisguised astonishment, as Hanson brought in the news with her breakfast ; "I don't understand it. Their affairs must be looking up in the world, Rachel, depend upon it. That prudent Betsy should be within reach of her best milch-cow, and not apply for a draught of the refreshing fluid is amazing ! I feel as if somebody had made me a present. I debated in my own mind last night before I fell asleep how much I could spare her, and now I am all the richer by what she has not begged. *Gone*, is she ? I am heartily glad of it ! I shall take my dry toast and tea with the better appetite. I feel stronger and livelier this morning than I have done since we left Prior's Bank, and I have saved at least ten pounds."

This news seemed to Rachel and her servants much pleasanter and more to the purpose than any coming or going of the Gilslands, and as the day went on Bittersweet's report of her health received confirmation. She got up at noon, went out at four o'clock, and the next morning gave orders for an immediate move on Paris, saying that if she fell ill again, her followers could amuse themselves there without minding her.

Poor little Annis had missed a very near chance of a rescue, and the Gilslands had had a very narrow escape from discovery ; so narrow that Mrs. Gilsland hardly recovered from the nervous shock of it sufficiently to travel out of the risk. But her husband had no mercy on her weakness ; he foresaw that if she once got a glimpse of Bittersweet's face, reviving her former days of peace and respectability, the whole dangerous secret would be out, and his prospects in life dashed down for good and all. And therefore he made her go.

II.

The vivacity of Paris agreed with Mrs. Sara Grandage. When she had been there a week she was quite agreeably settled in private apartments close to the Champs Elysées. Opposite her windows she had a prospect of a very charming garden, gay with flowers, and with acacia trees all sweetness and bloom leaning over the high wall. Many of her old friends rallied round her ; foremost amongst them a witty cosmopolitan lady, all sparkle and naughtiness, who was English-born, but whose tongue invariably glided off into French when her unreined spirits ran away with her discretion of speech ; then there was an ancient, very poor Legitimist comtesse, very, very old, possessed of an artist son, also old. The mother spoke of the Bourbons as

courtiers spoke when Louis Fourteenth was king, of the Orleans as *bourgeois*, and of the Bonapartes with execration, mockery, and contempt, vociferous and shrill. In listening to her talk, which was rapid and picturesque, Rachel felt as if the world had rolled back fifty, sixty, seventy years, carrying her with it, and stranding her amongst the ghosts of the *ancien régime*.

The Oliver Warleighs were in Paris now, living in an apartment in the Rue du Colysée, not ten minutes' walk from Mrs. Sara Grandage's, and settled as Lady Georgiana hoped, for a permanency. One day Oliver Warleigh met Clip in his peregrinations, and being informed where his mistress was staying, took his wife to call; and Rachel observed the moment they were ushered into the saloon that neither of them wore a speck of mourning for poor little Annis, though it was not yet six months since they lost her.

Bittersweet was generally delighted to see company, let it come how and when it would and in whatever shape, but she did not manifest any warmth of welcome toward them. They either did not or would not see her formal airs, however; but laid themselves out to be particularly amusing and courteous. Lady Georgiana looked quite herself; proud, calm, and fashionable, but Oliver was dreadfully altered; Rachel afterward remarked that she could not have supposed such a transformation possible; he was evidently in bad health, and his prompt displacement from the state and title to which he had too hastily raised himself on the rumor of his brother's death had disagreed with him in every way. If Rachel had known what the man had *suffered*, she would not have wondered at what he *looked*.

Lady Georgiana presently asked when and by what route they had reached Paris, and on Rachel's replying that they had come by Boulogne and Amiens, at which latter place they had been delayed ten days, she gave a quick glance at her husband which Bittersweet intercepted. It perplexed the old lady so much by its expression of menace that for a moment she was lost to every thing but bewildered conjectures as to its meaning; and she only woke up again to hear Rachel referring to the Gilslands and their convoy, and to see Lady Georgiana spring from her chair, and rush toward Oliver exclaiming, "Oh! Oliver, you are going to be ill again—you *must* resume your drops!"

"Yes, yes, it is the closeness of the room; when I get out into the air I shall be better," gasped he feebly; and refusing any stimulant he immediately left the house; both Bittersweet and Rachel feeling panic-struck at his sudden seizure.

Lady Georgiana determined never to commit the indiscretion of telling her husband anything again; she had thought to set some of his anxieties at rest by assuring him a few days before that the Gilslands had returned to England, and now there were more lies for her to invent in explaining away the child in black who had been seen in their company. But success attended her more than she hoped for; he accepted her assertions and execrated his own dangerous weakness; and an hour after, his wife returned to Mrs. Sara Grandage's apartments as serene and charming as ever to apologize and

explain. She said that Oliver had been subject lately to these attacks of faintness, which he ascribed to incipient disease of the heart; but this she believed to be nothing more than the fancy of a man a little hypped, and hoped that Paris with its cheerful scenes and society would soon restore him to his normal state of health.

Bittersweet hoped so too, and said it was not to be marveled at that he should find himself shaken by what he had lately gone through; and calling with Rachel to inquire the next day he was found ready to converse on any and every subject. But he did not now look half the man he was fourteen or fifteen months ago, when he went to Hurtledeale on that mission which resulted in the transference of Annis to his wife's care. His face was hollow and gray about the eyes, with a livid under-tint that came out strongly in moments of disturbance. He had lost his nerve with his health, and was quite subdued to his wife's authority; and so altogether worn and depressed that Rachel in her universal charity could almost have found in her heart to be sorry for this velvet-gloved Oliver whose claws had been clipped so close.

One evening, a few days only after this meeting Mrs. Sara Grandage and her goddaughter were invited to dine with the ancient comtesse and her son, who lived up in that quarter of Paris where the Gilslands had hidden themselves with Annis. After dinner the amusement was to look through folios of sketches, one amongst which literally startled Rachel from its likeness to Sir Laurence's little wildling. Had she not believed that the poor darling was lying safe in her grave by her mother's, she could have been certain it was taken from her very self; and Bittersweet was not much less struck by the resemblance.

It represented a child in a black frock, crouching up in the recess of a barred window, and watching the scud of the clouds over the sky. Its right hand clutched one of the bars in the apparent act of shaking it, and its mouth was set in just the same painful, resentful fashion as Annis had familiarized every body with at Bristol during the few days before she was parted from her father.

Perceiving how his guests were struck by the sketch, the artist would conduct them into his *atelier* to show them how it had been taken. Cornerwise from the main part of the house there extended a wing in which, so near that long arms might have shaken hands across, there were two windows grated like that in the picture. One *jalousie* being now open, they could see into the room, which was a gloomy, disfurnished garret, used apparently for nothing but the reception of lumber. In that window, rain or fair, the day in and the day out, he told them, the little solitary child used to sit with her thin face pressed against the panes, or when they were open for air, against the bars, like a caged bird. He could not tell precisely how long she was there, but it was very cold weather when he first noticed her, and she was accustomed to raise her frock hood-fashion over her head to keep herself warm, as he had represented her. He tried to engage her to converse with him, but she was persistently dumb, though she never retreated as if afraid when he opened his window to accost her.

When the guests were taking leave at night,

the artist presented this sketch to Rachel, who said that had it been more like the merry little gipsy when she quitted Hurtlemere, she would have sent it to Sir Laurence; but such a pitiful shadow of her as this would be worse than none. She treasured it herself, however, and at the first opportunity showed it to Lady Georgiana, who could not perceive the likeness at all, and said it was a thorough tawny, sallow, French child; but Mortimer, peeping over it with boyish inquisitiveness, cried out, "That is cousin Annis! Where is she, mamma? Who shut her up in that prison?" His mamma replied that cousin Annis was gone home, and was quite safe and happy, and he must ask no more questions; which he, trained to an implicit obedience, did not, except with his eyes, and they looked still full of inquiry.

Lady Georgiana told Rachel afterward in whispered explanation of Mortimer's remarks, that she did not allow her children's minds to be overshadowed by any thoughts of gloom, and that when Annis died her little companions were only told that she was *gone home*; and she begged that the drawing might be put out of sight lest her husband should come in and see it, adding that the very thought of the child agitated him dangerously in his then weak condition. Rachel instantly complied, but Mortimer, who was an intelligent boy, by-and-by came asking her stealthily, "Do you know where cousin Annis is?" She reminded him of the answer he had just received from his mamma, and by way of diverting his mind from the question, said she hoped he had loved her, and been kind to her while she was with him.

"No," he replied, with the frank truth that seeks no expedient disguises, "we did not love her very much. She was always crying for Lucy, and then mamma locked her up in the dark closet."

"Ah," thought Rachel, "my mind did not misgive me for naught! I will pry no more into the secrets of the poor little darling's last days of martyrdom."

III.

In July, Mrs. Sara Grandage moved out of Paris heat and dust to St. Cloud. The acacias were then in all their beauty in the park, and Rachel Withers thought it delightful walking through the long, straight, green avenues in the cool of the day. The Oliver Warleighs had gone thither also for a month, and the two families were naturally thrown much together. Katherine, in writing to Rachel, since she had been informed of Oliver's state of health, had entreated her not to suffer any prejudice to linger in her mind against him; and she had striven her best to cast it out, though only with partial success.

One evening, being in the park alone, she met him, also alone, and wearing the most lost, haggard look on his face that she had ever seen on the face of any living man. She had heard that an impression of peculiar anxiety always marks the countenance of persons afflicted with disease of the heart, and his conjecture respecting himself had every external sign of truth. He joined Rachel, and they walked for some time together, conversing of this, that, and the other—quite matters of general interest. It

was always her care to avoid speaking before him of little Annis, remembering Lady Georgiana's warning of what an exciting topic it was to him; but he now introduced it himself, in spite of her attempted evasions, and talked about the child in a nervous, disjointed manner for a long time; beginning from the day when they first received her in charge from her father, and then touching on various episodes during their residence at Hastings, which convinced Rachel that Annis could never have been happy or resigned in her changed lot. When he mentioned the breaking out of the fever, his agitation became excessive; and, at the risk of appearing rude or indifferent, Rachel checked him, saying, that as the poor little thing was dead and buried, and no regrets could bring her to life again, perhaps they had better relinquish the painful task of talking about her.

"True," gasped he, standing still for a moment, with a catching of his breath; "she is dead and buried, and none of us can bring her to life again!" If Rachel had been as anxious to make him talk as she was to make him silent, she must have heard all the facts that night. But he looked so livid and ill that she was thankful to see Lady Georgiana approaching with Mortimer to meet them. She offered her arm for her husband to lean on, and glanced scrutinizingly at Rachel, who whispered that it was not *her* fault, he *would* talk of Annis; an explanation which apparently satisfied her.

All this seemed very strange to Rachel when she came to reflect upon it. Though, probably, the Oliver Warleighs had to reproach themselves with neglect or harshness toward the child, their feeling now—his especially—appeared exaggerated. They who loved her could speak of her with the calm of tender regret; while those to whom she had been a burden found in her very name a source of painful agitation. When she suggested this to her godmamma, Bittersweet shook her head, and replied, in a cautious tone, "Speak low, Rachel; in this case, I am sure the least said will be the soonest mended. All is not right about Annis's death; of that, the oftener I see them the more am I convinced. To me, Lady Georgiana's carelessness is even more significant than Oliver's unquiet remorse. There are strange secrets in families, and the blacker our thoughts here, the deeper let us bury them. I could tell you many a startling story, my dear, that is as true as gospel, which would not bear and will never see the light of day for innocent living men's and women's sake," and thereupon both fell into a silence heavy with fearful meaning.

The day after this private warning of Bittersweet's, Lady Georgiana invited Rachel to join her in a drive to Paris, where she wished to give Mortimer a treat at Ronconi's, to celebrate his birthday. As they were returning to St. Cloud afterward, the little boy being seated on the box by the coachman, and out of hearing, she gave her companion a full and circumstantial history of Annis's sickness and death. Rachel did not invite her confidence, but she was not sorry to hear what she had to say.

Lady Georgiana began by telling her that after Lucy's departure from Hastings, Salter dominated over all the children, but especially over Annis, and acquired a mischievous habit of hold-

CHAPTER THE SIXTH.

A LITTLE WAIF AND STRAY.

THE darkest hour comes before the dawn.

I.

ing each up as a pattern and model to the rest, just according to the caprice of the moment. She was a hot-tempered person, and on two occasions a hasty blow followed up her hasty words, while her practice of admonishing one offender to profit by the superior example of the child who, at the moment, happened to be in favor, set the little folks at variance amongst themselves, and made the nursery a scene of perpetual dissension. This all sounded plausible and probable enough, little as it tallied with Lucy's character of her fellow-servant, or Salter's own account of her discharge.

When Lady Georgiana came to speak of the child's behavior under her rule she admitted that the gipsy-thing never did take root amongst her children, and perhaps never could have done so. She bore up pretty well as long as Lucy was there to control her, but when she was gone she became more untractable and unsocial than ever.

"She was what I call a wild-tempered creature," said Lady Georgiana. "If she could not have those near her she loved she would have nobody. She refused to accommodate herself to necessary changes, and had a tenacity of memory and of purpose that were wonderful in any thing so young. If she had recovered from the fever I must have rid myself of the care of her. It was too onerous—too trying. You can not imagine how she resented and resisted all my efforts to teach her; she learned nothing from me, and showed no capacity for learning. She was the most difficult child I ever had to do with, and I consider myself a born instructress—witness my success with my own children."

And so the conversation diverged to Mortimer, and his little brother and sister, who were certainly trained to a perfection of manners and obedience beautiful to behold. Rachel was not sure, however, whether it might not turn out that there was a fundamental error in Lady Georgiana's theory; and whether in binding her children with such a network of orders and restrictions she was not giving them rules instead of principles.

She detailed the foregoing conversation to Bittersweet that evening, and the shrewd old lady replied, "Lady Georgiana explains too much, but she will never explain away the dark impression that has been made on every body's mind. The child's death occurred at an unfortunate crisis for those who were interested in it. All the world has thought and all the world will continue to think what Mary Wray put into plain words—had the child fawn play? If she had *not*, the guilty are punished already enough to satisfy any revenge—look at Oliver's countenance; he is a haunted man. And look at Lady Georgiana—she is a prisoner at large. Don't be any more curious, Rachel; if you are wise, you will let the matter rest. Nothing but wretchedness to innocent persons could come out of searching into its secrets now. I tell you again as I have told you before—there are mysteries best left uncleared and doubts best left unverified."

HER Paris visit was drawing to an end, September was nearly over, and Rachel Withers was beginning to contemplate a return to Prior's Bank with satisfaction, when Mrs. Sara Grandage received a pressing invitation to spend a few weeks with her cousins, the Misses Ferrand, two maiden ladies residing at Claymire, a retired sea-side village on the Devonshire coast, not more than twenty miles from Linton, where lived Arthur and Grace Hill. The invitation included Rachel and Hanson, but not Clip, and as his mistress always felt at a loss without her factotum, she was at first anxious to decline it.

"I can not stay in that house," she said pettishly. "Every body is so overwise and over-good, and Delia, unless she be very much changed, would almost talk a spider to death—yet the worthy kind souls will be grieved if I refuse to go." She reflected a moment or two, wrinkling her brows and looking very disconsolate, but at last a bright idea struck her, and she exclaimed, "I'll tell you what we will do, Rachel; we will write and say we are too large a party to be received at Brookfall, but that if they can find nice lodgings for us in the village we will go and stay a month. Claymire is a very pretty spot even in October, and the sea air will freshen us all up after our stay in this dusty blazing Paris."

Her proposal was duly transmitted to the cousins, and was by them well received. They engaged a cottage for her about half a mile from Brookfall, and thither she took her journey with Rachel and her servants at the beginning of the following week. Claymire was a truly charming village, though its name alone was almost enough to give a stranger a prejudice against it. It lay in a little hollow girt with hills, the cliffs forming a beautiful bay. The leaves were just at the change when they are loveliest and fullest of varicety, and there were flowers enough still left in the garden at Brookfall to make of it a perfect rustical paradise.

Rachel Withers made up her mind that if she did not live in Hurdledale she should like to live at Claymire, in the cottage that had been taken for their lodging. It was a pretty little thatched nook, clustered over with roses and clematis, woodbine and ivy, even to the darkening of its tiny lattices. Clip by-and-by dared to insinuate the propriety of extensive pruning, but his mistress warned him that it would be at his peril if he touched a twig—let them be smothered in picturesqueness, it was only for a month! The village consisted of a few fishermen's and laborer's cottages, and three houses of a better sort where a few visitors who preferred seclusion to gayety took up their summer abode. The church stood about midway between the rectory and Brookfall—they could just see its spire through the trees from their windows. It was not a gem of architecture, but it was neat and well kept.

The rector was Dr. Ferrand, brother to the ladies at Brookfall; he was a widower with one son, a fine youth of about fifteen, who soon insinuated himself very deeply into the good

graces of Mrs. Sara Grandage, perhaps by reason of those questionable virtues which caused his aunts Delia and Flora to shake their heads seriously and distrustfully when they alluded to his future career. Fain would they that he ran quietly along that well-worn groove which leads into the church, but his present determination was to become a traveler and an adventurer, and nothing besides. His father made no attempt to thwart his inclinations, but only insisted on his having patience to receive the education of a gentleman first; and this he appeared to be getting combined with the accomplishments of rough-rider, sailor, sportsman and pedestrian; for he cultivated the muscular part of his Christianity with the heartiest diligence. Bittersweet delighted in him, though she said she did not see why he should be so big and tawny—neither his father nor his mother was above the middle size. However, such as he was, there he was, nearly six foot now, and promising to grow into a young giant before he had done; he dwarfed every body who stood near his long, leggy, awkward frame.

Dr. Ferrand was a very grave, silent, scholarly gentleman; silent, said his son, because he was so over-talked by his sisters in his youth that he had never been able to recover it. He, Sinclair, was not likely to suffer in the same way, for he was most irreverent of their little foibles, though he was fond of them too. And they were very good, though their powers of speech were truly bewildering; as for Miss Delia, she began at every opportunity, like a stream with a fresh on it, and long ere she had done, her listeners felt as if their wits were all being washed away on a tepid flood of vagueness.

She dearly loved to preach private sermons, and when once her eyes were closed to the face of her auditor, nothing could stop her. And her way of going to work was not quite fair either. She always assumed to open with that her victim was in utter spiritual darkness and ignorance, which was apt to put even a self-possessed person at a disadvantage. Rachel Withers one day caught herself with meek hands folded in her lap, hearkening and assenting to the most elementary and self-evident propositions as if they were then dawning on her understanding for the first time; and this demure air of respectful interest, though quite unintentional, encouraged Miss Delia's pet propensity until Rachel fell to nodding at her for sheer drowsiness.

At last, either by an instinctive effort to escape from further homiletic discourse, or as an intimation that she had possibly heard some similar observations before, Rachel murmured that her father had been a clergyman, and her only brother was also in the church, which brought Miss Delia to a momentary check—she was glad to hear of her young friend's privileges; probably cousin Sara had mentioned her connections in her letters, but if so the particulars had slipped her memory. Great talkers rarely are good listeners, which perhaps accounts for their bad memories.

Miss Flora was a shade or two less loquacious than her younger sister; and they were both pretty old ladies—that is, they were about fifty, but had elderly ways and white hair, though they had a faded rose of complexion still left,

and nice fair skins. Their dress was all soft and neutral-tinted, without rustles or wrinkles, and put on in a fashion that was theirs and nobody's besides; nothing scripped or poor about it, but so far modified from the prevailing style as at once to intimate that they belonged to a world apart from that which follows the lead of Paris.

Their house of Brookfall was as delightful in its way as Prior's Bank. It was very appropriately fitted up in cottage style, and had odd, unexpected nooks and corners, with shelves of dainty china and oriental gimeracks without number. And there were growing flowers in stands everywhere, which gave it the perfumy atmosphere of a conservatory. But after Rachel had heard the excellent ladies engage in conversation, she understood why her godmamma chose rather to stay in lodgings than to place herself quite at their mercy in their own house.

II.

Immediately after their arrival at Claymire, Mrs. Sara Grandage and her goddaughter spent a long day at Brookfall, where they met at dinner nearly every body who constituted its intimate society. There were Mr. and Mrs. Wallis from the rectory at Knowle—he what Bittersweet called “a faith-sans-works man,” she pious-frivolous; Mr. More, a bachelor of uncertain age, wealthy, neat-looking—rather too bland and precise in manner, but Miss Delia Ferrand's model of a charmingly good young man; Mr. Clarke, the Claymire curate, and his sister, both quiet, pleasant people; Captain Hartford, a red-faced, jovial naval officer; Mr. Wilson, the surgeon of the district, and Dr. Ferrand and his son Sinclair; and to obviate the fatal mistake of thirteen at table, a quaint little spinster of great vivacity was procured at the eleventh hour in the village. Her name was Miss Crispe, and she might be any thing short of a hundred years old.

And they heard of somebody else. “Positively,” said Rachel to her godmamma, “the Gilslands would be justified in believing that we are hunting them about.” It appeared that they had arrived at Welsbeck Vicarage a couple of months before to take the duty for the clergyman of the parish, who had obtained a year's leave of absence from his cure on account of ill-health. They had two boy pupils, and a little niece living with them. The neighborhood had called upon them, and though Mrs. Gilsland was not popular, and people marveled what could have made her handsome husband marry her, he was well thought of, especially in the pulpit. He had preached a charity sermon at Claymire soon after his arrival, and had delighted every body but the doctor with his fine flow of eloquent language; the doctor had a masculine preference for matter over manner, and made a private resolution that he should not be in haste to invite that high-flown, sentimental preacher to occupy his pulpit again. But many ladies, Miss Delia Ferrand amongst them, professed admiration of his flowery style.

Considering the marked manner in which the Gilslands had avoided them at Amiens, Bittersweet and Rachel were both agreed that there was no necessity to visit them here; and as Welsbeck was four miles from Claymire across the downs it was devoutly hoped that no un-

lucky accident might throw them together. They had been invited to dine at Brookfall the same day as themselves, but had declined on the plea of Mrs. Gilsland's having caught cold. Any knowledge Mrs. Sara Grandage and Rachel had of their previous circumstances, they thought it only just and wise to keep to themselves.

"Perhaps they are trying to redeem themselves," said Rachel; "let us not spoil their chance."

This season of the year had its drawbacks even at Claymire; after a few days of pleasant autumnal weather there ensued a week of wind and rain, and nothing to do, which made Rachel long to be comfortably settled at Prior's Bank again, with her books and work around her; but they were pledged to stay here a month, and even had they been free to escape at once, Bittersweet could not have traveled in such cold and boisterous weather.

Toward the end of this week it was that there occurred a remarkable incident which gave rise to a world of talk in that quiet neighborhood, and summarily abolished the Gilslands' chance of peace and prosperity in that part of the country.

Sinclair Ferrand had been out on one of his adventurous expeditions over the downs, and was returning at dusk when he was overtaken by a tremendous storm. The fog then gathered so thickly on the hills that he lost his way, and went wandering about until long past night-fall, uncertain where he was, and afraid almost to move, lest he should find himself suddenly at the bottom of a deserted quarry or of one of the scarped cliffs that characterize the Claymire downs. For some time he took shelter under the lee of a cart-shed, and when the mist lifted a little, he began to move cautiously on in a descending line, trusting to come soon on some familiar object that would put him on the way to the rectory. But as if he were on enchanted ground, he could apparently make no progress; for he presently found himself back at the old cart-shed, or else approaching another precisely similar.

As he drew near, he heard a sound which he at first supposed to be the moan of a dog; he whistled, but nothing appeared, and the sound ceased. He then went round to the other side of the building, whence he saw start up out of the wet and mire, no animal but a child which immediately ran off down the hill. He cried out to it to stop, but it still fled on, and believing it to be some little village girl, lost in the storm like himself, and now fearfully escaping from him as from a new terror, he started in pursuit, and captured the fugitive very soon; but so far was she from being grateful to her protector that she struck at him vehemently, and struggled with the desperation of a wild animal to get loose again. The lad wisely held her fast, and when her fright or passion had exhausted itself, he asked her where she came from, and if he might carry her home. To this she sobbed that he could not—it was beyond the hills ever so far away, but she should know it when she got there; and then she strove to wrest herself free again both with frantic efforts and touching entreaties.

Young Ferrand had no idea how to calm or comfort her except by kissing, which universally

understood language of kindness met with partial success; for she at length consented to allow him to grasp her hand and steer her gently down hill; and soon after, the storm blowing over and the mist with it, he was able to discern certain landmarks, by which in about half an hour's time he reached his aunt's house at Brookfall. But here again, as soon as the child found herself returning to regions of civilization, she renewed her struggles to escape, and she was at last presented before the benevolent old ladies beating with all her little might against her determined captor.

He carried her into the kitchen, and set her down in the midst of a group of wondering woman-kind, announcing that she was lost on the downs, and they had better take care of her until the morning, when they might perhaps find out to whom she belonged; and Miss Flora's old dog Floss getting up and amiably licking her face, either frightened or soothed her so much that she ceased her crying and was quiet.

"It would have touched a heart of stone to look at her, I assure you it would," said Miss Della Ferrand with the tears in her eyes as she recounted all this to Mrs. Sara Grandage and Rachel. "A poor, sickly, pitiful little face, all eyes and mouth, gazing round at us strangers as if we were hunters and she at bay. She had no covering on her neck or on her head, and only a pair of miserable ankle-strap shoes, broken at the sides, on her feet; and she was wet to the skin—and what was worse than all, when we came to undress her and put her into a warm bath to make her comfortable before bed, we found her little body marked with stripes new and old—we did indeed! Monster that could use a child so! When Dolly our kitchen-maid saw it she fell to crying and kissing the wheals, and the poor thing stared as if she did not know what tenderness meant. It was almost too much for dear Flora when she asked for something to eat, and ate it, oh, so hungrily! She must have been starved as well as beaten, and oh! she had been beaten cruelly!"

Miss Della said further that they had teased her with no questions, but when she seemed fit for it, she was carried to Dolly's bed, where she presently fell fast asleep quite exhausted and worn out. All the excellent household were painfully shocked beforehand, however, by her incapacity to say her prayers; they tried her to no purpose with a few of the most familiar that children use, and after fumbling in her memory as it were, she at length began to recite a little Catholic hymn, "Gentle Jesus," but broke down at the second line with sobs and tears; and so they laid her in bed, and the good pious old ladies breathed a special prayer for her instead.

The next morning Sinclair Ferrand was up at Brookfall very early to inquire after his little waif, whom he found sharing the kitchen hearth-stone with Floss in the height of friendship and good-fellowship. She had been washed and brushed and fed with bread and milk, and would have looked comfortable enough but for a trick she had of pressing her hand on her brow and murmuring: "Such a pain here, such a bad pain here!" Sinclair tried to coax some intelligence out of her to guide him in his search for her family; but she was either too

languid or too stupid to answer, and Dolly would have her let alone, predicting that she was going to be laid up. And so unfortunately she was. Out in the night rain so long she had caught cold, and being feeble, starved, ill-used and wretched besides, the result was a kind of low fever. And there she was at Brookfall, poor little mortal, aching and moaning, while Miss Delia Ferrand was relating her piteous story to Bittersweet and Rachel.

As they were listening, a shrewd suspicion gradually crept into the mind of each, and neither was surprised when, as the result of Sinclair's inquiries, his capture was discovered to be Mr. Gilsland's niece, or, as the reader who is behind the scenes knows, Sir Laurence Warleigh's little wildling!

III.

A fortnight went over, and the poor child at Brookfall still continued desperately ill—wasted to a skeleton she was; and through all her pain and weakness, she lay moaning, incessantly moaning, for "Papa, papa!"

Mrs. Gilsland had only been allowed to see her once; for when she was introduced into the room the sick creature manifested such a terror and repugnance at her presence, that, in her delirium, she sprang out of bed and tried to creep under it. Her affectionate kinswoman wept "canting, crocodile tears," said Dolly, and deplored her naughtiness, exhibiting a bite in the thick part of her hand, inflicted by the child's teeth the afternoon before she ran away, and declaring that from the first hour of taking her under her protection she had been as indocile and untractable as a wild animal out of the woods.

Miss Flora suggested that if she had tried the magical power of kindness instead of blows she might have succeeded better. Mrs. Gilsland promptly denied the blows; but Miss Delia as promptly contradicted her denial, and referred her to Mr. Wilson, who was attending the child, if she desired to hear her treatment of it accurately characterized. The two kind old ladies could not find terms in their own vocabulary strong enough to express their disgust, and Sinclair Ferrand, with the fervent indignation of youth, expressed a desire to *walk into* Mr. Gilsland, and to send his odious wife to the treadmill.

Some sort of negotiation had been begun with a view of the child's being left altogether under the care of the ladies of Brookfall, but thus far Mr. Gilsland had refused to give her up; though as every body thought he might, after what had happened, have been thankful to get her a good home away from his wife, who, of course, bore the heavier share of popular execration. It had been found impossible to keep the affair quiet, and such an outcry against them had spread through the country that they would certainly be obliged to leave Welsbeck. In view of this necessity, Miss Delia Ferrand's heart became strongly set on retaining the child.

"She has always been wanting something to try her educational theories upon ever since I have known her," said Bittersweet. "Years ago; if she could have set up a baby of her own without bother or impropriety she would

have done it; the experiment of adopting one is critical, and rarely satisfactory in its results. But now this little waif has drifted into her lap, it is my belief she will keep it, and defy the Gilslands tooth and nail. A determined body is Delia when her mind is made up, gentle, drowsy, loquacious as she seems when she has nothing particular in view."

Rachel Withers had discovered, even through the kind soul's floods of tepid talk, that she was both importunate and persistent; but she wished her success in this instance. The hapless little orphan would find herself in clover at Brookfall; and bringing her up wisely and plainly was sure to issue there in plenty of petting and indulgence to the top of her bent. Mrs. Sara Grandage also entered so far into her cousin's good intentions as to promise to exert her personal influence in bringing about the desired result. The Gilslands were not aware of her being at Claymire, and she determined one day to astonish them by a descent on Welsbeck unannounced, so that they should have no chance of evasion. She insisted on Rachel's accompanying her, much against her inclination; and Miss Delia Ferrand having also volunteered herself one of the invading party, the trio drove over to Welsbeck in the Brookfall brougham, wrought up variously into excited mood, and ready at all points for the stormy encounter they had to anticipate.

Welsbeck Vicarage stood upon the high road, and was a half, dark house in front, but the drawing-room into which the visitors were ushered looked on the garden, which was large, shady and pleasant, though just now neglected. The place bore no other sign of its present tenants save this neglect, seeing they were only installed in it temporarily during the owner's absence abroad; and after the formal dispatch of their names through the little servant, most punctiliously recited and impressed on her rustic mind by Miss Delia, they had to sit in silence and observation for a considerable time. The importance of the occasion was on Miss Delia's mind most responsibly; and Rachel was too uneasy in the situation to talk, but Bittersweet enjoyed it rather than otherwise, and presently gave her humor play.

"I daresay Mrs. Gilsland is beautifying; she was always too slovenly to be presentable at a moment's notice," whispered she; then, "Rachel, how do you feel?" Rachel replied that she felt in no way particular; on which, to enhance the dramatic interest of the occasion, the old lady embraced this critical moment to say to her cousin, "Mr. Gilsland was Rachel's first love, Delia; and he quarreled with her for his wife's sweet sake—but she was not his wife then. Was he not a man of discernment?"

"Don't romance, Sara; I won't believe it!" cried Miss Delia, and just then the door opened with a suddenness so remarkable that every body felt sure Mrs. Gilsland, who now entered, must have been near enough to overhear this inconvenient effusion of Bittersweet's malice and mischief.

She appeared with her head and neck swathed up in flannel, her sharp features sharper, and her watery eyes more weepy than ever. She was suffering visibly from a very severe influenza, and seemed so weak and depressed as to be at

first hardly able to speak. The interview opened with general greetings and remarks between Mrs. Sara Grandage and herself, and the visit seemed to run a risk of dwindling away into one of mere courtesy when Miss Delia Ferrand broke peremptorily into the conversation.

"Cousin Sara, postpone these trivial things. to matters more serious," said she, in a tone which quelled irrelevance at once and convinced Rachel, if she had any doubts remaining, that this was the woman to come, to see, and to conquer if it were in the power of feminine determination to do it. Mrs. Gilsland started, dressed herself feebly up in her chair, and began to fidget nervously with the gilt handle of the card-basket as Miss Delia went on with her challenge, slightly incoherent in style, but quite clear in meaning. "About that cruelly ill-used child, laid up ill at Brookfall, and my sister most likely sitting by her bed, if not Sinclair and Floss to amuse her as well; what are you going to do?"

"I can do nothing without Mr. Gilsland; you had better talk to him, but he is in the village now," was the fretful reply. "I begin to wish we had never seen the child; she is no end of trouble. From first to last it has been a most unlucky business for us—such terrible anxiety, worry and care; it will get my life at last, I know it will. As I am continually saying, No money could pay us for the burden."

"Paid for it, are you? Then the more shame for you, Betsy, that you beat and starved the poor thing!" interposed Bittersweet.

"We did not starve her or beat her," returned Mrs. Gilsland, doggedly. "If she says we did she is a wicked story-teller; but she is the worst child I ever met with, and could not speak truth if she tried! She sulked at her meals, refused her food daily, and flung herself about in her passions until she was bruised all black and blue."

"How came she to bite you? you must have been engaged in a pretty close struggle then," observed Miss Delia.

Mrs. Gilsland began to cry, and Bittersweet proceeded to address her in a voice of solemn appeal.

"Now, Betsy, listen to reason. You are no fool, but, on the contrary, a very shrewd and long-headed woman. It is of no use inventing fictions and excuses to divert us. You are in a difficulty, a very damaging difficulty, which all the little world of hereabouts is discussing angrily. You can not remain at Welsbeck after what has been made public; and in leaving you would be as well rid of the child as she would be well rid of you. My good cousins at Brookfall are willing to keep her, since Providence has mercifully delivered her into their hands, and such an opportunity of freeing yourself of an onerous charge is not likely to recur. If you will give her up, what are the terms? will you keep her penny-fee and let the child go, or will you give up the child and her pay too?"

Instead of answering, the poor creature looked mute and terrified, and following the direction of her scared eyes the visitors saw her husband standing in the open doorway of an adjoining room, from which he had entered noiselessly, giving each one a disagreeable shock of surprise.

"What is all this, Betsy, and who are these people who come here to talk of my giving up

my brother's daughter?" exclaimed he, staring at his frightened wife as he advanced into the midst of the party with an air of awful dignity.

"These people," said Bittersweet in her most sarcastic tone, "are your old acquaintances, Mrs. Sara Grandage and Miss Rachel Withers from Hurtleddale, and your new acquaintance Miss Delia Ferrand from Claymire."

It was Mr. Gilsland's turn now to be taken aback; evidently he had not recognized the visitors at the first glance; he had observed nothing beyond the fact of his wife's being seated in committee with three ladies, one of whom was addressing her in a severe and pointed strain; for he halted, lost his color and self-possession, and begging Mrs. Sara Grandage's pardon in stammering terms, sat down, looking not much less helpless and amazed than his wife. Miss Delia gave him no time to recover, but at once discharged over him the batteries of her fluency—reproaches, adjurations, entreaties enough to take away any body's breath but hers. By the time she was thoroughly run down, however, he was almost his own man again, though by the flickering unsteadiness of his eye and his hesitation of manner it was plain that she had awakened in him, if not a wholesome sense of shame, at least a sense of ignominious disgrace. Still he reared up his head with an air of insolent defiance when he spoke again as if, come what would, he was prepared to brave it out.

"Have you seen the object of this benevolent lady's exaggerated sympathies?" asked he, turning to Mrs. Sara Grandage, and for all his attempted bravado listening for her answer with an almost sickness of anxiety; the certainty present to his mind that if she or Rachel Withers *had* seen or *did* see her, all his plots and prospects and respectability were blown to the winds.

"No," replied Bittersweet; "I have not seen her, neither do I desire to see her. She is not able to bear the intrusion of strange faces round her pillow. We do not wish to frighten out of her emaciated frame the little life there is left in it, or to gloat over the misery, cruelty and neglect can inflict upon a child. She is in good hands now, and you will do wisely to leave her there."

"Indeed you will!" added Miss Delia with great fervor. "You may relieve yourselves of a burden, and bestow on us a boon at the same time, for which we shall truly thank you. Nobody has seen her yet and nobody shall see her, poor little lost darling, until she is strong and well again. Mr. Wilson says it is not safe to irritate her nerves or her brain at all now, and we must shut every body out. It was God guided her like a tiny frozen bird to our door, and it would go to our hearts to cast her forth again. You will not drag her from her refuge, Mr. Gilsland; you will intrust her to our care—care which will never be felt by us as a tax!" Eagerness in the pursuit of her wishes made Miss Delia coherent and almost eloquent; but Mr. Gilsland got up, shook his head, walked to the window, came back again, and protested that it was impossible; against his most sacred feelings, against his undertaking to his brother on his death-bed—he could not do it, he *could* not, and yet all the while there was yielding and capitulation in his manner.

Rachel Withers, silent herself and taking no

part in the discussion, had the more leisure to observe, and it appeared to her that he would have been most sincerely relieved to be free of the child, but that some powerful secret consideration induced him to retain it—perhaps the money, for he was evidently but ill off. His wife watched him intently, her lean hands clasped, her dull eyes fixed in a very pathetic supplication.

"You had better, Alfred," murmured she, but she never spoke again after the glance he gave her in reply.

The treaty did not advance much farther than this. The utmost Mr. Gilsland would pledge himself to was not to remove his niece from Brookfall until she was quite recovered from her sickness, unless he should have to go away from Welsbeck before—then, he said, of course, he could not leave her behind.

As they drove home Miss Delia, in talking the business over, was greatly inclined to interpret Mr. Gilsland's protestations as Rachel did, but Bittersweet's shrewd observation took them both by surprise when she said: "The man has somebody to consult besides his wife—if the decision lay only between those two it would immediately resolve itself into a question of pounds, shillings and pence."

IV.

A few days after this embarrassing interview, as Mrs. Sara Grandage and her goddaughter were sitting at luncheon, there arrived a lad with a note from Mrs. Gilsland which Rachel was bidden to read. On opening it and seeing the few irregular pencil lines of which it consisted, she remarked aloud that she thought it must have been written in haste and secrecy, and undoubtedly so it was. Mrs. Gilsland entreated her old patroness to go to her immediately, saying that she believed her hours were numbered, and that she wished before she died to speak to her on a subject that lay very heavily on her mind. "I must see you alone," she wrote, "and if you arrive between three and four o'clock we shall not be interrupted."

There was a very violent thunder-rain falling at the time; Claymire boasted but one carriage to let out at hire, and this had to be sent for from the inn; then the horse that drew it was to be fetched some distance from its work in the fields, which delay made them so late that it was past four o'clock when they left the cottage; Rachel going for company to her god-mamma on the drive.

As they entered the long village street, Mrs. Sara Grandage espied Mr. Gilsland crossing the road to the rectory; he turned his head, glanced sharply at the carriage, and looked very haggard when he recognized its occupants. They reached the door at the same moment, and he presented himself at the carriage window directly it stopped, when Bittersweet, without hinting at the summons she had received, immediately said: "I have heard that your poor wife is worse, Mr. Gilsland, and for old sake's sake I should like to see her once more if I can be of any use."

"No body can be of any use," said he; and the thought struck Rachel that she was already gone, but in the next breath he explained that she was only weak and wandering, so that if any

chance of recovery was left her it lay in perfect rest.

"Still, as I am here, go and ask if she would like me to come up," urged Mrs. Sara Grandage. "Better not," replied he; "much better not. She has been very low since last night and has not recognized any of us."

Now Bittersweet saw that this could not be strictly true; for if the poor woman had been in a state of unconsciousness, how could she have written that message to her? In spite of his advice, therefore, she made a movement to leave the carriage, and he opened the door for her to get out. "You may stay where you are, Rachel," said she, and then turned and entered the house, determined at all events, to compass a sight of Mrs. Gilsland in whatever state she might be. It seemed a very long ten minutes to Rachel before she returned; and when she did appear she looked exceedingly grave and troubled. Mr. Gilsland was with her, and they did not exchange a single word as he put her back into the carriage which immediately drove away. Rachel presently asked how Mrs. Gilsland was.

"All but gone," Bittersweet answered her. "Whatever condition she might be in earlier in the day she is speechless now, but I think she knew me. Her eyes rested on my face and she ceased her groaning, but only for an instant. I wish I could guess what she wanted to tell me. Rachel, I loathe him worse than ever—hard unfeeling wretch! I feel sure that poor soul quakes in her dying bed when he is standing by. He *would* go in to prepare her, as he said—I wonder whether she would have spoken to me had I seen her without his *preparing*."

The next morning in very good time, Miss Delia Ferrand went down to the cottage to communicate the intelligence that Mrs. Gilsland was dead—she had died the night before at eleven o'clock, never having rallied for a moment. It seemed sudden and was a great shock both to Bittersweet and Rachel; enough to make them vow never to speak or to think hardly of any body again. But a few days ago, they had felt that she was abhorrent to them, and already she was beyond their repentance, their consideration, their forgiveness. Which of the two—herself or her husband—was most to blame about the hapless child was not material now; on the dead dispraise lies very lightly!

They had not told the poor little waif who was still lying so ill at Brookfall, that her aunt was dead, Miss Delia said, neither did they intend doing so until she was up and about, of which there was no present prospect. "She is full of freaks and fancies, which we can not reconcile at all with the account given of her by Mr. and Mrs. Gilsland," continued the kind soul; "and yet she does not talk as if she were light-headed. Mr. Wilson says we can not exercise too much caution with her, and nobody enters her room now except dear Flora and Dolly—even I keep out. If it please God to make her well again, then my turn will come. She persists in calling for her papa, and in affirming that he is not dead—now we all know he *is* dead, because she is in mourning for him. The little frock she had on when Sinclair brought her to Brookfall is tucked half-way up with crape. It is difficult dealing with such an idea—what would you do

about it, cousin Sara? Would you take no notice and let the delusion wear out; or would you reason with her on the naughtiness of maintaining it in defiance of her uncle and poor aunt—but *she* is gone now."

"I should certainly not chafe the young thing's feelings by insisting on her believing any thing grievous," replied Bittersweet. "Let her speak of her papa as being alive if it comforts her; as she recovers her strength and finds herself in the midst of people who are good to her, she will realize the truth with less pain." The old lady then asked Miss Delia if she were already busy laying her plans and developing her theories for the education of her protégée.

"I am not sure that she is mine yet," said the worthy kind creature, coloring with beneficent pleasure at the prospect the question opened out before her. "I am sure of nothing—Mr. Gilsland has given me no undertaking that she will be left with us; but I entertain more hopes of his yielding since he has lost his poor wife; for what can a solitary man do with a little girl like her on his hands? I intend to see him again as soon as the funeral is over, and to urge him to a decision. My brother does not disapprove the scheme, and dear Flora quite enters into it. I shall thoroughly enjoy having a child to bring up; something I can call my own and manage just as I like. Of course we should train her judiciously, and make her capable of helping herself, but also we should consider it a duty to provide for her—if she married, for instance; or outlived us, remaining single, which in the common order of nature might be looked for. We were speaking last evening of music, and though we are disinclined to whatever savors of worldliness or frivolity, still, if she have talent we should let her learn music, and singing also if her voice be sweet, not otherwise—Flora had a very sweet voice when she was young; I hear no singing like hers nowadays. The child's accent is rather provincial in speaking, as if she had had a Scotch nurse about her, and some of her sayings are very quaint; for instance, Floss begged for a bit of her mutton yesterday, and she gave him a mouthful off her fork, telling him he was 'like the Lord Mayor's fool, and knew what was good for him!' Dolly laughed heartily at the oddity of the comparison, for Floss does make a god of his inside. She can not read, though she is past five years old, but, as Flora and I both think, we had much better begin on no foundation than on a bad one; and I am sure we shall find her education a delightful task."

"I wish it may not turn out harder than you expect," said Bittersweet, smiling over Miss Delia's enthusiasm. "These young folks have ways and wills of their own bred in them, and are not to be trained as easily as lapdogs."

"The great secret is management from the outset," replied Miss Delia with an air of experience and sagacity; "begin as you intend to go on; be firm in kindness, but above all, *be firm*. 'Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will never depart from it'—there are counsel and encouragement both."

Mrs. Sara Grandage retired from the debate. Miss Delia evidently had a heart full of good intentions, and a head quite empty of the knowl-

edge which comes of laboring to carry good intentions out; but like other knowledge worth having, she would only get it at the price of experience. It was well that she should start with a profound faith in the ultimate success of her undertaking, for she was sure, let the child become ever so docile and intelligent, to meet with some shocks and disappointments in carrying it on; but the little waif was assuredly fortunate in having been cast into such kind and conscientious hands.

Doubts of Mr. Gilsland's decision were expressed, but few were really felt. "Supposing there were some person in the background who would have a right to claim her in the event of his desiring to relinquish his charge," Bittersweet argued, "not many kinsfolk would strive with each other for the guardianship of a portionless orphan, or dispute the responsibility of adopting her when you are ready to take the sole charge, Delia." Miss Delia was glad to think so until the affair was settled.

v.

Mr. Gilsland played his part to admiration in the final interview that he had with Miss Delia Ferrand and Mrs. Sara Grandage, but both the ladies trusted that he did not suppose he was really taking them in. He looked rather thin and out of health, and an air of melancholy suited him; at all events, he wore it steadily throughout the meeting, and spoke of his wife in terms that would have been touching to any person not aware of the facts. He was leaving Welsbeck forthwith, and he was prepared to yield up his niece on what to every body seemed easy conditions. He stated distinctly that no one had right or power to interfere in the disposal of her except himself: for to the best of his knowledge and belief she had no blood relations besides. Her mother who was dead was an only child, and her father, "a dissolute reprobate, though he said it," was his own only brother.

He prevaricated slightly in his answers to the questions Mrs. Sara Grandage put to him in reference to the money his wife had implied was paid for her maintenance; saying at first that his wife was mistaken, and then admitting that there *were* a few hundreds—but here Miss Delia interposed with an assurance that he was welcome to keep them for his own necessities, as she would have nothing whatever to do with money; the child must be wholly and solely dependent on herself.

This matter was soon arranged and passed over, and then they went on to consider future terms of correspondence; and here a hitch seemed likely to occur; but it was finally smoothed away by Mr. Gilsland's agreeing to abstain from all personal interference between his niece and her protectress, on condition of being kept informed of her well-being twice during the year. Considering how very little feeling he had testified for her before, he was very exact in making his rights understood now. If she had been his own daughter, and he had had a strong natural affection for her, he could not have been more anxiously scrupulous than he was.

"You must mind what you are about, Delia, or he will make the child an instrument for

screwing money out of you by and by," said Bittersweet, in accents of warning when the last details were arranged and he was gone. "If he ever attempts it, don't parley, but hand him over to the doctor or your old lawyer, Napper, at once.

"I will, I will; but don't make me feel unsure of my prize so soon," replied Miss Delia. "You can not imagine how my heart rejoices over the thought that we are to keep her. I wish she may be well enough for you to have one peep at her before you go away. She is beginning to do nicely now."

They hoped so too, but the veriest trifle interferred to disappoint them. On what small hinges turn the great courses of life! On the last day of their stay at Claymire, Mrs. Sara Grandage and her goddaughter walked up to Brookfall expressly to see and admire Miss Delia's treasure, but when they arrived Dolly reported of her as being in a beautiful sleep—and sleep was salvation to her now; and when Rachel suggested that it would perhaps be only the better opportunity, Miss Flora cautiously objected on the score that the door creaked so it could not be opened wide enough to enter without waking her; Brookfall Cottage was very old, and all the doors creaked and the floors too.

Thus was lost the last chance of discovering the cruel treachery which had brought Sir Laurence Warleigh's little wildling into the hands of these good Samaritans. It was a kind Providence perhaps that left her there.

On the journey home to Prior's Bank, Rachel Withers caught cold, and on her arrival she was laid up with an attack of inflammation on the lungs. She had never been ill in her life before, and made but a very bad patient; thanks to God and a good constitution, however, she won safely through, though some delicacy and susceptibility were left behind. Dr. Beane would have had her seek a warmer climate for the winter, and her godmamma would have gladly assented, but she rebelled against the proposal and prevailed; it sounded so very invalidish, and besides she wished to be near John and Katherine and the bairns.

All was well in that household: John stoutening fast into rectorial dignity, and Katherine keeping steady matronly pace with him; while the children, as their nurse declared, were the most rantorian trio ever she was plagued with. Health and good spirits were cheap amongst the boys, and Sacharissa Tulip was just beginning to toddle; but being naturally fat, and much overweighted with sash behind, she came down *flump* at every other step; she fell soft though, which was a comfort, and took her jolts in very good part, only chuckling and staring with big, amazed blue eyes, at each recurrence of the bump, as if they were quite a novel catastrophe.

When Rachel began to go out again it was December; the sky was gray with mists, the woods and gardens were all blown and wintery desolate.

"What changes in Hurtleddale since last year at this time!" thought she, the first Sunday she went to church after her recovery. The little grave by Helena's was green, and Annis's name was there on a new memorial stone below her mother's. During his brief reign Oliver Warleigh had had the cedar which his brother planted on his wife's grave cut down, much against John's and Katherine's wishes, and the stone placed against the wall instead. And there Rachel, unsuspecting of how near she had been to a discovery of the fraud, read the lie it affirmed before the world.

Young Mr. Bond had returned to England a month or two before, but Sir Laurence, to every body's relief, had been prevailed on to adhere to his original intentions, and continue his travels. In a letter to Katherine which Rachel read, he spoke in a tone half pathetic, half sarcastic, of Oliver's disappointment, and seemed in no way inclined to resent the temporary usurpation of his name and estate.

Of his daughter he said very little, and that little blamed no one but himself—he ought not to have left her. And so in Hurtleddale it was all over—all the distress, and mourning, and expectation, and save in his heart, Helena and her baby were as if they had never been!

PART THIRD.

AMONGST GOOD SAMARITANS.

CHAPTER THE FIRST.

AT CLAYMIRE.

BLESSED are the merciful.

I.

ANNIS, or Alice as she was now called, and as we must also call her, so long as she remains Miss Delia Ferrand's treasure, did not make a public appearance down-stairs until Mrs. Sara Grandage and her goddaughter had been gone home to Hurtleddale a month. It was then very cold weather, and she was such a fragile mite to behold that the cautious old ladies would not hear of her putting her little head out of doors, though she gazed wistfully from the windows during many an hour in the day,

and longed to feel her feet on the green grass once more. Her recollections had come back to her but very imperfectly, and Mr. Wilson warned Miss Delia against any attempts to stimulate her mind for perhaps years to come; good food, kind usage, and much play were all she was fit to profit by now. The lesson-books that had been bought in readiness for a beginning were therefore laid on the shelf; a cargo of toys was obtained in their stead, and Alice found herself established in a state of permanent holiday.

It must be allowed that at this season she affected the kitchen and Dolly's society in preference to any other at Brookfall, which gave Miss Delia her first acute distress on her *protégée's* account. That Alice should love Dolly who had

nursed her like a mother was quite right and proper, but she must learn to love *her* more; so the kind old lady would set the child in her lap day by day, and tell her stories of children who were remarkable for early piety and genius, but who all came to premature endings; in the hope of winning her heart and her interest through these pretty parables. Alice listened always with wide-eyed composure; but one day when she had attended in spirit the touching scene of a little angel-girl's death, she said,—

"I don't want to be good, auntie Dee."

"My petkin does not want to be *good*!" echoed the old lady, greatly surprised and shocked.

"No. Good children all die—I like to stay and play with Sinclair better."

"You darling, and you shall stay and play with Sinclair!" cried the illogical instructress, and kissed her with enthusiasm.

That playing with Sinclair was Alice's prime enjoyment. He made great fun of her, called her quaint little Goth, and teased her and tossed her and worried her continually, and perhaps she pulled his tawny locks oftener and harder than was pleasant in return, but they were firm friends and allies notwithstanding. To him she confided her hopes of seeing her dear papa again, which the aunts gently but firmly discouraged; to him she recited such scraps of her ballads as survived the general wreck in her memory; and to him she fled for comfort and refuge when her wild temper got the better of her, and her benefactresses were in displeasure.

Alice was not a reformed character yet—she had not changed her nature with her name; she was as little patient and as much willful as in her first estate; and Miss Delia found her self-imposed task by no means one of unmitigated joy. Sinclair was the child's aider and abettor in many a naughtiness; for with the mischief inherent in boys, he delighted to set her upon pranks that aggravated and astonished his sober aunts; and when Miss Delia took him to task he would toss back his shaggy mane and reply:

"She was the captive of my bow and spear—that is, of my kisses. I found her, aunt Dee, and I have a right to at least half of her."

He had half of her love at all events, and more than half; not the whole bench of bishops could have convinced Alice that any thing was wrong Sinclair bade her to do. During his long absences at Rugby she was much more amenable to discipline as enacted at Brookfall than when he was at home. On one occasion, fully aware of his aunt's prejudices against dogs indoors, he gave her a tangled clew of a puppy to carry home, bidding her tell auntie Dee it was quite a *drawing-room dog*, and then, perhaps, she would be allowed to keep it. Alice was in the highest glee over her acquisition, and presented herself before her benefactresses' astonished spectacles with the little animal bundled up in her frock, and only its face out.

"My joy, what have you got there?" cried Miss Delia, staring very hard at the black pug and bright eyes.

"A drawing-room dog!" responded Alice, "look!" and plumped down on the rug with the puppy in her lap.

"There are no drawing-room dogs, petkin," said the old lady, shaking her head seriously. "Carry it away, darling, to the place you brought it from."

"Sinclair gave it me to keep, and I *will* keep it," replied Alice, eyeing Miss Delia with unwinking firmness.

"No, no, sweeting; auntie Dee can not allow her treasure to have drawing-room dogs," was the answer, very gently spoken. "Dogs belong to out-of-doors, except old Floss, and he is put up with in the kitchen. Now, I know my chick is going to be good and do what I bid her."

Miss Delia was rather premature in her assurance; Alice was by no means going to be good, if that included dispensing with the puppy. She cuddled it up in her arms and left the room, and a minute or two after Miss Flora, who never took part if she could help it in the little disputes that occurred between her sister and their *protégée*, said, "I think, Delia, if you look out you will find she is carrying the dog up-stairs."

So she was; and the dog and she kept the room which had been appropriated as her nursery, against the aunts, against the cook, and against Dolly for several hours. The doctor happened to drop in while the argument was going on through the key-hole, and he was invited to plead with her, but declined on the pretense that he should be defeated; she had locked herself in, and there was no getting at her except by parley, to which she turned a deaf ear, or else by breaking open the door. When Sinclair heard from his father of this great game going on up at Brookfall, he went off in haste to take his share; which came in the shape of a long remonstrance from his aunts. Finally, however, he was prevailed on to coax Alice out, and extract the puppy from her strict embrace; and this he did by promising to bring it up to pay her a visit whenever he had time. And then with a little excusable triumph he wagged his head at aunt Delia and said, "You see none of you can manage her but *me*." None of them could manage her at any rate with the same ease and absence of struggle.

II.

This incident of the puppy may be taken as an example of the sort of life Alice led the ladies at Brookfall. She loved them with all her heart, but as Dolly slyly and irreverently expressed it, she soon had the length of their foot, and knew how to caress and wheedle them into letting her have her own way in almost every thing. They were by nature indulgent, and where they gave an inch the child took an ell, while her coaxing, affectionate ways covered her encroachments. In this manner passed over her head two or three years. She learned to read, and as soon as she had done that, she became a devourer of books; though they were for the most part but dull books on which she could lay her little hands. At eight years old she was set to learn music, under the tuition of Miss Clarke, the curate's sister, who gradually took upon herself all the systematic instruction Alice at that time received. She was not a very docile pupil, even to Miss Clarke, and if

she set her face against learning any particular lesson, the end was that she did not learn it.

Miss Delia and Miss Flora allowed no one but themselves to impart to their darling religious instruction, and though their talk must often have been most bewildering to the little sensitive heart and brain, still Alice could not but gain a life-long good with their practical Christian example before her eyes every day. An ounce of example is worth a pound of precept whether exhibited before old or young.

The greatest trial to both her benefactresses was the tenacity with which she clung to those ideas about her father which, accepting Mr. Gilsland's narrative of her parentage, they were bound to regard as delusions. As she grew older they grew stronger, and any reasoning against them only threw her into a mood of gloomy grief which never went off until she had slept a night upon it. When they talked to her of heaven and of the good things of God, they would try to lead her to think of her dear father and mother as being there with Him; but one day after they had been more earnest with her than usual, and she had appeared, as they fancied, rather softened and responsive, they heard her murmur to herself, "All the same, papa is *not* dead!" Thenceforward they desisted from their attempts, and determined to maintain an unbroken silence on the subject; and Mr. Wilson advised them to take no notice of her vagaries, promising them that she would grow out of her moods and her delusions together in the course of time.

Hitherto there had come no interference from without to disturb their possession of their treasure. Mr. Gilsland kept to his conditions, and had not been seen at Brookfall since he relinquished his guardianship of his *niece*. He was now serving a church in London, and was creeping into popularity of a certain kind by slow measures. His letters of inquiry came with undeviating regularity, and Miss Delia Ferrand answered them with the same exactness; keeping him fully informed as to the child's progress in her education. Alice was always made to listen to his letters, which were expressed in the most kind and kinsmanlike terms; but the invariable result was an outburst of temper. One Christmas when she had achieved a legible round-hand of her own, an attempt was even made to persuade her to answer a pretty little epistle he had addressed to her; but she turned obstinate on the spot, utterly refusing compliance, declaring that he was not her uncle—he was nothing to her, and she *hated* his very name! These wild words were passed by as ravings that it was very wrong for her to utter; but no second effort was made to induce her to correspond with Mr. Gilsland.

From the first day of her going out at Brookfall, Alice had betrayed her passion for riding, but until she was ten years old she never attained to any fuller gratification of it than a trot round the paddock on Sinclair's horse when he came back from a ride. The young man was gone to college by this date, and was carrying off prizes for scholarship and honors for his achievements in physical sports, until his name was becoming quite a glory to Claymire. It was he who proposed that Alice should have

a pony, and go out with him when he was at home for the long vacation; and Miss Delia entered into his wishes so far as to promise that she should have a pony if she did not fly into a pet over Mr. Gilsland's next letter, or moon about once for a whole week, dreaming that her father was alive.

Sinclair thought kindly to warn her of the conditions annexed to the attainment of this much coveted indulgence, but Alice, with indignant tears in her eyes, and crimson in her face, cried, "Sinclair, how *dare* you tempt me? If I were never to see a pony again, if I were never to see *you* again, I would not say I think papa is dead; for he is *not*; and Mr. Gilsland is a wicked bad man to pretend that I belong to him!"

Sinclair felt a little ashamed and confused at this undaunted rebuke from the fearless child, and he did not mention it to his aunt at the time; but on her telling him a few days after how Alice had failed at the test, he said, "Aunt Delia, I think she ought to have the pony for holding on to her idea. She evidently thinks she should be guilty of falsity did she profess to abandon it; I gave her notice of what you had made contingent on her being *good* in *your* fashion, and she asked me how I *dared* tempt her. My father thinks she should have the pony too."

So Miss Delia being no argumentative moral philosopher, but only a tender-hearted old lady longing to grant her darling an indulgence, caused the pony to be bought, and in its new equipments, to be presented before Alice one morning as a surprise. And to witness her ecstasy was a treat!

"Brownie, Brownie!" cried she, exultant, and kissed the white star on its forehead, and capered round it at her wits' end for joy. Sinclair suggested Stella as a more appropriate name, but she reiterated, "No, no, Brownie!" so Brownie was thenceforward the name of it.

III.

During the next two years there was a very marked intellectual advance in Alice; she proved a really quick child, and not only quick, but also capable of earnest application when her subject suited her. But it could not be said that in the matter of docility and temper she made equal progress. Perhaps Miss Delia was at once too strict and too easy; or, to speak without paradox, too fidgety in her rule. Alice was averse to formalities; there was much monotony at Brookfall when Sinclair was away; she had no companions of her own age, and the literature supplied to her as amusing might have been more correctly classed under the improving and wearying. She felt a great love and gratitude toward her benefactresses, but she rebelled against them often; and then ensued fits of grievous remorse which they were fain to kiss away with tender assurances that they knew she tried to be good, though she did not always succeed. This was not very wholesome discipline; her feelings were too often on the stretch between her own temper, the softness their loving lectures excited, and the self-reproachful moods that followed.

"She has fine and delicate instincts — she is brave to the core and truthful as the light," said

Miss Delia to a married woman of her acquaintance who had several daughters of her own. "I am never afraid of her doing any thing really wrong, but she is becoming a source of great anxiety to us. She is at once too childlike and too womanlike. I wish I knew what was the best thing to do with her."

"I should send her to school," was the prompt advice; "one girl in a household of grown people is too much considered and worried after ever to turn out a thoroughly healthy character."

Miss Delia entertained a prejudice against schools, and was not sure Alice would bear to be sent from home at all, until Mrs. Sara Grandage, to whom also she had partially revealed her distresses, told her of a Miss Cornwell, a friend of Rachel Withers, who lived in the neighborhood of London and took only six pupils, whom, with the assistance of masters, she educated entirely herself. It was the midsummer-holiday time then, and as neither of her benefactresses could have been easy in conscience to send Alice to a perfect stranger, Miss Cornwell was invited to spend her vacation at Brookfall to be made acquaintance with.

Alice was not apprised of her quality or the cause of her coming, but she fortunately took a liking to Miss Cornwell's sensible countenance and straightforward manners; so that though she made a very grievous face when she found herself about to be exiled from home and the presence of her aunts, they encountered no angry opposition. Mr. Gilsland was apprised of the intended change, but he did not gainsay it; only remarking that with Miss Cornwell's permission it would be gratifying if he were now and then allowed to visit his niece.

Some of her quaint sayings were all Alice was admonished by Miss Cornwell to leave behind her when she went to school; it was strange how those odd phrases of Mary Wray's and Mistress Dobie's had stuck in her memory when so much else had faded away from it. Within five minutes her future instructress heard a couple of them—Floss being the subject thereof. Miss Delia was grieving over him as not relishing his dinner, which she feared was a sign of his being unwell, whereupon Alice remarked, "He'd be worse if he ailed aught." And on his depositing himself cosily on Miss Cornwell's muslin gown as she sat on the turf, she added, "Floss, thou's as brazen as a milner's horse that stops at every body's door!"

"Alice, darling!" said Miss Flora remonstrative, when she saw Miss Cornwell's rather surprised amusement; for the child gave not only the spirit of the words, but the accent too. Alice darling only laughed, however—perhaps she had said her sayings with so much gusto for the perverse purpose of shocking governess propriety, and if so she achieved a perfect success.

And thus at twelve years old Alice went to school. "She was the sunshine of Brookfall," said Sinclair when he next came home and found her gone. "I don't know how you could bear to part with her."

"My dear boy, we could bear worse things than parting if we believed it to be for her good," replied his aunt Delia, but there were tears in her kind eyes as she spoke; for the cottage had been a very dead-alive place indeed since its bit of youth and brightness was taken away.

IV.

For the next three years Alice remained under Miss Cornwell's care, nothing happening during that period of greater importance than the return of the holidays, when its Sunshine went joyously home to Brookfall, sometimes accompanied by Miss Cornwell, and always by her favorite friend, Jane Grantham, whose mother was dead and whose father was in India.

In Hurdledale there had been no changes either, and no new suspicions bred. Every body had grown nearly ten years older since the day poor little gipsy's pantomime funeral came over the wintry moors, but otherwise things had gone on pretty much in the old routine in the various households of our friends and acquaintance. Sir Laurence Warleigh had been in England twice or thrice in the interval; and when he went down into the north he always made his home at the Hurdlemere House. His brother Oliver and Lady Georgiana had lived chiefly abroad, Oliver during several years having been placed under restraint with a physician at Tours, while his wife lived at Bonn for the sake of her children's education. He was better now; Sir Laurence had seen him, and objected to his being kept any longer in his semi-captivity; and early in the year of the Great Exhibition of eighteen hundred and fifty-one they returned permanently to England.

Lady Georgiana had undergone her trials and persecutions too; but they were borne in a dead silence. She had been kept fully informed of all that had befallen Annis, and had acquiesced in each change that had been made for her advantage. When she thought of the stolen child now, she looked at her own beautiful Mortimer, and schemed in her heart secretly, how some day her wrong-doing might be undone, or a compromise made with Heaven about it by marrying the two; but such compromise was yet in the far future, and meanwhile her pains and penalties multiplied upon her, and her three tools became her tyrants—tyrants such as only greedy, guilty, conscienceless men and women can be over another in their power.

CHAPTER THE SECOND.

AFTER TEN YEARS.

TEN years are past, life is no more
The fairy land that once I knew;
Pleasures have proved but falling stars,
And many a sweetest spell untrue,—L. E. L.

I.

It was the twenty-second of April. Mrs. Sara Grandage was profoundly intent on her *Times* for a long while that morning, and when she laid it down at last and took off her spectacles, she gave vent to a genuine sigh, which caused Rachel Withers to look up in much amazement; for a sound of this nature did not escape the old lady more than once in a twelvemonth. On raising her head Rachel found her godmamma contemplating her with a comical, lachrymose expression to match the sigh, and on her asking what was the matter, she replied in the most irrelevant way, "Dumpling, you are still a young woman—still a young woman, you know."

"Comparatively," rejoined Rachel, marveling what Bittersweet would discover next—reviving that ugly old name too, which had been abolished by common consent ages ago!

"Comparatively, of course. You are not a girl, but your powers of enjoyment are as keen and quick as ever."

"Oh, yes! I am ready for any little pleasure that comes opportunely in my way." Here a pause, then Bittersweet again, "Dumpling, it begins to occur to me that I have perhaps been rather selfish about you, and that some day you may reproach my memory for it." (What can have put that nonsense into her head? thought Rachel.) "It is pretty here; Prior's Bank is very pleasant, but this is a dull life we lead for a woman who is still young." (Rather late in the day to find that out, thought Rachel again, but she only said she did not often feel it so.) "An occasional variety does us all good. You enjoyed our Paris excursion amazingly, I remember."

"Yes; that is nine, no, ten years ago."

"Ten years, is it? How short they seem! Ten years! And we went to Claymire afterward, did we not? That was at the time poor Betsy Briggs died. I recollect it all now!" And then she again took up her newspaper, and was absorbed for another half hour, at the end of which she threw it from her, exclaiming with a gasp, "No, it is impossible to picture it, quite impossible! Rachel, do come and talk; you are scribbling letters forever!"

Down immediately went Rachel's pen, and "What is the text?" said she, ensconcing herself in her favorite easy-chair, with a bit of idleness in her fingers, ready for one of those interminable talks with which Bittersweet now wore out half the day.

"This great exhibition—should you not like to go to it?" was the answer, and in an instant she was wide awake.

"Like to go? Of course, I should like to go! John and Katherine are going, and the Hills, and all the rest of the world!" She would have added, "Let us go, too," but she remembered her godmamma's seventy-six years, and refrained herself. But the old lady, who was as vivacious and not much less active than formerly, said it for her without demur.

"Let us go, Rachel—we will go!" cried she; and from that moment it was decided. They did not discuss the matter, they settled it. Hanson and Clip would accompany them, and take all trouble and care off their hands. Rachel felt as jubilant as a child setting off to sea for the first time—a very healthful frame of mind to be in at the advanced date when her godmamma good-naturedly spoke of her as *still* a young woman.

"As we are going, let us go to the opening!" was the next proposal. "It will be a fine spectacle, and I always liked a crowd." When Bittersweet undertook any thing, she did not undertake it by halves. "And we will stay a month or six weeks in town, and see every thing there is to be seen." It was very far from Rachel's mind to ginsay any thing so charmingly desirable. "And we shall meet every body we know. Even cousin Delia has discovered that it is her pious duty to go, since the object is the furtherance of peace and good-will amongst

men; and Flora and the doctor will be there, of course; and Sinclair, and probably that little girl who has gone to school to your friend, Mary Cornwell. You will be glad to see Mary Cornwell again, Rachel."

"Of course I shall. She is the only one of my peculiar set who remains unmarried like myself except Carrie Martin."

"And can you fancy this magnified glass-house roofed in two elms as big as any about here, as easily as our conservatory roofs in a couple of camelias? And the jewels, Dumpling, and the laces, and the china! I always had a passion for lace and curious china;" and so she went on, exciting her own and her goddaughter's anticipations to the utmost over this famous gathering of wonders of the world.

The same afternoon, full of impatience to spread her report, Rachel went up to the rectory to communicate with Katherine about the journey to town, stating her godmamma's queer preamble and all; when to her utter astonishment, her sister-in-law fully acquiesced in Bittersweet's self-accusation; if she could have anticipated such a tirade as followed Rachel would certainly never have told her.

"So she *has* been selfish, *very* selfish!" cried Katherine. "John and I have often thought so, and regretted that we ever allowed you to live at Prior's Bank. It is nobody else who has prevented your marrying and settling in life, as it is every woman's duty to do—yes, Rachel, every woman's *duty*!"

Katherine was so serious and impressive that Rachel could not help laughing as she protested, and truly, that nobody had ever made her an offer but Mr. Gillsland—and who could say it was *her* fault she had not married *him*?

"Of course, no one ever made you an offer—how should they when you gave yourself airs of being a hundred years old? But you might have had that excellent James Pemberton, who was all your imagination fancied that other man whose name it sets my teeth on edge to hear! Yet there he is now, flaring away at some proprietary chapel in London as a fashionable preacher, and several of the papers speak well of him! Defend *me* from such a shepherd; he quite destroyed *your* life and chance of happiness!"

"Don't be sentimental, Kate; I am blithe and blooming yet! And I never cared a straw for your James Pemberton."

"You did, Rachel, you can not deceive me, you *did*! but you just echoed to yourself Bittersweet's mischievous old prediction that you were cut out for an old maid, and you would not give way to it. If you had given way to it it would have come, and you might have been now as happy, independent and well off as I am with dear John."

"It is silly to talk to you! You married women who have married to your liking feel yourselves at the very top of creation. Now, I would not be worried with your three tearing Turks of children—no, not if they could be mine to-morrow!"

"That is just spite, envy, and jealousy, Mistress Rachel, *spite*, *envy*, and *jealousy*, every bit of it!" cried Kate with serene defiance, and actually in her own mind convinced of the truth of what she said.

Rachel asked her if she would like her to go and get married *now*—being *still* a young woman; but to this her sister-in-law answered, No, she was much too old, and had let all her chances slip long ago; adding, with a quaint mischief on her face, that one maiden aunt in the family was desirable—even if it were only to tuck Sacharissa Tulip's petticoats. Rachel took the hint, as she had taken many another in her little goddaughter's behalf, and left the rectory with a bundle of fine muslins under her arm. She was a capital needlewoman, and the child outgrew her clothes very fast.

Rachel was not in the mood just then to admit it to Katherine, but she knew Bittersweet's prophecy *had* tended to settle her vocation. She had learned to think there was nothing lovable about her after her trouble, which gave her a shy, cold, restrained manner. She was constantly cheerful; but after all cheerfulness is but a bright coldness, and satisfies no one without a happy vein of passion and sentiment below it. She knew in her secret heart that Katherine with her three rantorians and beloved John was better off than herself or than Bittersweet with all her wealth and personal popularity. The old-fashioned idea of woman's happiness, she thought, was best; though when she had leisure to reflect and observe, she found much might be said on the other side of the question too.

Calling at the cottage of the present curate on her way back to Prior's Bank, she asked his merry little cricket of a wife if *she* were to be treated to the great show in London.

"Oh, dear no, Miss Withers, neither of us. We have six good reasons for staying at home!" replied she, pointing to her young fry—each one a step below the other, and the eldest not yet ten years old. Rachel agreed with her—six unanswerable reasons they were; looking at their frayed shoes and often renovated little garments she said to herself:

"Mrs. Barton is doubtless a proud and happy woman; but my pussy's boots never wear out, and at this moment I rejoice in my freedom from her numerous family cares!"

II.

Rachel Withers had never staid in London before, and it could hardly be said with truth that she enjoyed it now. It was too noisy and too bustling. Mrs. Sara Grandage never went out on foot, but she thought Rachel ought to take advantage of her opportunities; and she was therefore sent abroad with Clip, who thirty, forty, fifty years ago, knew the town well. He had not forgotten it yet, though the changes were many and great. He found Rachel's company a vast anxiety, especially when there streets to be crossed—which there always were.

When he said, "Now, miss, we must get across here," Rachel made a rush—the dismayed countrywoman at every point, looking neither to the right nor to the left, nor anywhere but at the distant pavement where she would be, and executing the most venturesome evolutions in her swift transit, as if instead of being winged by fear, she were the bravest of the brave. Then up panted Clip, growling: "You shouldn't run, miss; it's the worst thing you can do is to

run!" But she could not help it. Occasionally she yielded to the expedient of taking hold of his arm as a safeguard, but she had not the proper degree of confidence in masculine protection, for she invariably found herself alone when she reached the flags, without at all knowing how she lost him.

Clip conducted her one day north, another south, then east, then west, from their lodgings in Harley Street, showing her the various quarters and the tribes thereof. They were in the city one afternoon toward four o'clock, and at a very wide space with fine public buildings round it, the Exchange, the Bank, and others, where the chaos of carriages, the rush of feet, and the confusion of tongues were awful, Clip said, in his most provokingly calm manner: "Now, miss, we have to get across here."

"No, Clip, not unless you can change me into a bird of the air," was her response; "clearly we must wait!"

"You *may* wait," rejoined he, with serene contempt, and prepared to start.

"Show me where I must aim for!" asked Rachel, wildly; "oh! they may take London who like for me! I shall never wish to find myself *here* again!"

Clip pointed over the heaving sea to the farthest corner of all, and was instantly washed away by an advancing wave of clerks. She made the plunge desperately, with her eyes shut for any thing she could remember afterward, and reached the appointed place in safety, then looked back on the perils of the passage with secret wonder and admiration of herself.

No disappointment befell either Mrs. Sara Grandage or her goddaughter; they saw what they came to see, and met those friends they hoped to meet. The excellent cousins from Claymire arrived in town a few days after themselves, but when Rachel and her godmamma called at their lodgings they were out; and the first encounter between them took place quite by accident in the exhibition rooms of the Royal Academy.

There was the worthy doctor with a sister on each arm, viewing many of the pictures with spectacles of disapproval, and there was the towering Sinclair taking charge of the little girl whom he found on the misty downs nearly ten years ago, and whom his aunts had now quite adopted as a child of their own. Rachel Withers was rather curious to see her, remembering her relationship to Mr. Gilsland, and the singular events attending her change of protectors; but her close cottage-bonnet did not afford much opportunity for finding out what she was like. She was a tall slip of a girl, of about fifteen years old, with very handsome eyes, but dressed so quaintly, in conformity with her benefactresses' pious prejudices, that neither her face nor her figure was set off to the best advantage.

Sinclair Ferrand and she seemed to be immense friends and allies; and Rachel overheard a debate betwixt them and Miss Delia which amused her vastly; it seemed so characteristic on both sides. The zealous, benevolent lady had found out by this time that feminine plants taken in hand to prune and train ever so early

have still a willful way of growing left inherent in their nature.

"Auntie Dee," began the child, in the true tone of coax-wheelie; "Auntie Dee, may I go with Sinclair to see the Ride on Thursday?"

"The Ride—what, in the Park?" said Miss Delia, gazing up in her face with reproachful surprise.

"Yes; I like it almost better than any thing. It is my grandest holiday treat."

"But, Alice, my love, you have forgotten—you were to go to Exeter Hall to hear the dear bishop speak, with the doctor, your Aunt Flora, and myself. Do you recollect that so it was settled?"

To this Alice answered nothing, but she made a little *mou*, expressive of utter indifference to bishops, and had they not been in a public place, from the look of her, she would have accompanied the *mou* with a touzing embrace of her auntie's bonnet; and if she had done so it could hardly have been left more queer and original in cut than it was. Miss Delia pretended not to notice this pantomime, and turned her eyes resolutely on a lady painted in yellow drapery, who extensively hid, without adorning, the wall opposite their seat in the middle room, and kept them fixed there until Sinclair, having been telegraphed to by his young friend, came to her assistance, and addressed his amiable aunt with serene composure, like a person sure of success who yet condescends to forms of conciliation and entreaty.

"You don't care about going to Astley's, do you, Aunt Delia?" was his insidious opening question.

"Astley's, Sinclair, what is that? Oh, the circus. No, of course, I shall not go; only one remove from a *theatre*!"

"Then I might as well take Alice to the morning performance to-morrow, and reserve the Ride for Thursday, when you all go to the Hurlaballoo Islands."

"Sinclair, don't be irreverent! You know we disapprove of such exhibitions, and why will you teach the child to rebel?"

"But she must see it; Astley's is quite a place to be seen by people from the country. I wish you would go too. I daresay even Quakers go there—*horses* can not be wicked, you know."

"It is not the horses themselves I object to, but the temptations they lead people into—standing on their hind-legs, poor ill-used things, and jumping through hoops. I saw it once myself under a tent that blew down, and only once, but there was no real improvement in it, and the pistols firing off quite frightened me—accidents happen so soon. Never mind Astley's, Alice, you shall go the Waxworks instead." Here Alice's countenance became as expressive against waxworks as it had previously been against bishops.

"Oh, well, she'll see plenty of wicked folks there, all paint and spangle,—I don't envy her!" muttered her advocate, sarcastically. "The distinguished criminals in the Chamber of Horrors are nice acquaintances for a girl, and if you tell her their histories, no doubt it will have a fine moral influence on her character."

"What do you mean, Sinclair? I dislike satire."

"I mean that horses are a far pleasanter sight than those grinning masks you want to show her—enough to give her bad dreams for a month. And I am sure she would rather not see them. It would do you good to go through a penal course of fashionable dissipation yourself, aunt Delia: theatres, concerts, balls, smart gowns, fine caps and all—make you feel wiser and more charitable ever after. It is only because you don't *know* that you are so dead set against all amusements except such as are not amusing!"

"Sinclair, you do very wrong to say so. I never put my foot inside a theatre and I trust I never shall."

During the foregoing colloquy Alice had stood mute as a mouse, but at this point she interposed with a sly, inimitable assurance, and said: "Then, auntie Dee, I *may* go to the Ride on Thursday instead of to the Bishop, if it is to be dear, delightful Astley's to-morrow?"

Miss Delia waved her head despondently and murmured, "Naughty, persistent child!" and again became absorbed in her contemplation of the lady in yellow. This appeared by the young folks to be understood as granting tacit consent, for Alice gave Sinclair a jubilant glance, and then went off with her hand tucked under the young man's arm to inspect the pictures in the farthest room, to which they had not yet paid their compliments.

Miss Delia and Rachel being left to themselves had a brief spell of moralizing over the difficulties and responsibilities attending the bringing up of children, which was suddenly ended by the irrelevant old lady uttering aloud the sentiment which had been fermenting in her mind ever since she sat down on the red bench.

"Well," said she, "I should not like to be hung up at full length in a public place like this! 'Mrs. Jones of Langpudgwyllam,' and no doubt many truly interesting pictures turned out to give her space enough. Four good landscapes I have calculated by some in her vicinity would be required to cover her ample skirts, and a fifth her head and bust. You remember the portrait of my dear mother which hangs in the doctor's drawing-room at the rectory, Rachel—the lady in the scarlet bodice. It was painted in the year after her marriage by Mr. Gainsborough, who is dead long since; but compare that sweet, tender, womanly figure with this obtrusive piece. I greatly admire a good portrait, but this is offensive; and more from the artist's flagrant bad taste than from any fault in his subject. He has contrived to give a modest woman a meretricious air—if I were her husband I should burn the picture. Suppose we change our seat and look at something pleasanter."

They changed their seat accordingly, and being joined by the doctor, Miss Flora, Mrs. Sara Grandage and a lady who had just claimed to renew her acquaintance with the last, they talked over the pictures that had most struck them, and found out that they took very different views of art. The strange lady, who was a disciple of the extreme new school, went off into a high-flown rhapsody that amazed and puzzled Rachel. She could not help speculating how much of it was claptrap and how much sheer windy nonsense; ideas ripen slowly in the country, and tongues move in old-fashioned, plain phrases, but the quiet daleswoman imagin-

ed this flowery glibness that sounded so clever to the uninitiated might with a little careful practice be found very easy of imitation. However, when she had given six negative answers in reply to six questions whether she had seen six masterpieces in six different foreign galleries, her mind was oppressed with the knowledge of the art critic, and she took refuge in a stern contemplation of a bit of sunny landscape below the line and just opposite her. She would have been more perplexed than ever could she have known that this lady had not seen the six masterpieces any more than herself, and knew as little of any art, except the art of fluent conversation, as did she.

From the Royal Academy Mrs. Sara Grandage and Rachel went home with the Ferrands to their lodgings to dine, as it had been settled when they met, lest the opportunity should not recur again so conveniently; for as they all wished to visit such places of public entertainment as chimed with their respective tastes, and these tastes differed materially, private engagements would be apt to interfere. Rachel hoped thus to have the chance of studying more closely Miss Delia Ferrand's protégée, but Alice's holiday hours expired at five o'clock, and instead of going home with her aunts she was sent straight back to school under Sinclair's convoy.

Sinclair Ferrand had done with college now and taken his degree—fourth wrangler—and from the heedless lad of fifteen whom Mrs. Sara Grandage had fallen in love with ten years ago at Claymire, he had sprung up into a very fine-looking though tawny-headed young man of five-and-twenty; remarkable for personal prowess no less than for scholarly ability. His father was a pleasant gentleman of the learned ancient school which is fast going out with shorts and shoe-buckles; and in many of his best traits his son was like him. The aunts were exceedingly proud of his university honors, and where his gayety of temper trespassed on their gravity of principle or prejudice they were always ready to excuse him on the plea of exuberant youthful spirits.

Rachel Withers did not know when she had met with a more kindly and pleasant family party than were these out-of-the-world folks from Claymire. They fell to talking over old times, and Miss Delia commended herself as having only been in London once in her life before; very different to cousin Sara who always spent the season in town so long as her father and her husband lived—yes, and for several independent years after they were dead! But then cousin Sara's father was in parliament, and wealthy, and worldly, and her husband was given up to every kind of dissipation and frivolity fashionable in fashionable society; for her part, Miss Delia did not know how cousin Sara had borne it so long; and the late hours had begun to tell on her health before she could make up her mind to withdraw from the vortex. Bittersweet listened to the solemn rehearsal of her ancient gayeties, and only smiled good-humoredly; reviving a few old anecdotes of society which the doctor capped from his experience with others quite as amusing. The doctor had lived with a clerical generation that loved its cakes and ale as well as common men. He and his cousin Sara were of minds somewhat

akin, and enjoyed each other's little stories, whisped aside lest they should shock the demure spirits of his reverend sisters, like two people who understood each other.

Very precise and punctilious the reverend sisters were, and some people might think, perhaps, righteous overmuch; but if they were narrow in theory, they were strict in practice, and there was no asperity in their tempers to set a cruel edge to their judgments of those who did not agree with their views. They were never caught compounding for their own sins by condemning other people's; and were so genuinely honest and sincere in word and deed that they invited from every body an implicit confidence and reliance.

Miss Delia naturally enjoyed expatiating on the subject which was most of all important to her amongst her earthly cares. Alice was uppermost in her thoughts, waking and sleeping, and she engaged the not reluctant Rachel to listen to her that night, giving her pretty full details of how her educational experiment had turned out.

"I have not had every thing quite as I could have wished, but if the child has been a great care she has been a great blessing too," said she with a smile and a sigh of heartfelt satisfaction. "We had not the mother-feeling which is the surest key to child-nature, but we did our best, and we trust that the results may prove we did not do much amiss. She loves us, and feels that we love her dearly, and that has been the great secret. We are exceedingly pleased with the effect of Miss Cornwell's training upon her; she is very apt in the controlling and managing of young folks, and, to confess the truth, our dear girl has a strong will of her own which requires a firm hand on the reins."

Miss Flora gave additional significance to this revelation by waving her head slowly and adding, "A very strong will indeed for a *girl*," at which emphasis the doctor laughed and said, "It was often a battle of the wills, and nine times in ten Alice had the best of it."

Miss Delia did not apparently relish this allusion; for she made haste to change the conversation after remarking with a decision that nobody attempted to gainsay: "But the child is a good child at heart; and in her way through this world of temptation, she had better be over-resolute than over-pliable. Such marked strength of character is not given her for no purpose; and though so far as we can judge at present, her life may run on calmly and safely enough, perhaps the All-Wise foresees that she will one day stand in need of all her steadfastness."

III.

A rainy day in London was no opportunity for making up arrears of letters or of any thing else. One morning Rachel Withers awoke to hear a rattle and patter against the windows, at which she felt quite thankful and rejoiced, saying to herself, "Now to-day at last we shall be quiet—we can not possibly go anywhere to-day." But at breakfast her godmamma dispelled her idle hope by observing, "The rain will cool the air; so, Rachel, we will go to the Exhibition again. It was rather too much for

me the last time, with the sun and the dust and the drive there. We will order Clip to have a carriage at the door by twelve o'clock."

And to the Great Exhibition they went accordingly; but, as it happened, they saw on this occasion much more of kinsfolk and friends, than they did of the glories of the show. John Withers and Katherine had just arrived in town, and the first group Rachel espied on entering consisted of her brother and his wife, Sir Laurence Warleigh, Lady Georgiana and her husband, and their son Mortimer, now a beautiful, well-grown youth of seventeen.

Sir Laurence looked at all points the traveller and adventurer he was—hearded, bronzed, stalwart and unconventional. His brother Oliver was leaning on his arm, and seemed to have much need of its support. He was a confirmed hypochondriac now, always expecting something of a distressing nature to happen. It was very painful and pitiable to be with him for long together, and her friends wondered how Lady Georgiana endured it; but Lady Georgiana appeared to endure it with a very resigned and commendable patience. She was never absent from his side either at home or abroad, into company they did not go, and very rarely to any place of public amusement. It was not without much persuasion and urging that Sir Laurence had prevailed on his brother to come out with him and be enlivened by the spectacle of the Exhibition on this occasion.

Unlike many persons given up to melancholy, Oliver Warleigh was not irritable; his air of sufferance and his submission to Lady Georgiana were perfectly touching. A man who had something on his mind—that was the impression he gave to strangers, and to those also who, like Mrs. Sara Grandage and Rachel Withers, had not seen him for several years. He walked with a stick, slowly, his head bent forward, his eyes usually turned toward the ground, but lifted now and then with a quick, apprehensive scrutiny to the faces of those speaking around him. Thus were they on this day once raised to Rachel's face, shocking and startling her by their wild expression.

She was speaking to Lady Georgiana of Mary Cornwell, and recommending her school as a suitable place for her daughter Clara, who, she had been telling Rachel, did not prosper under a governess without companions to stir her emulation. Rachel mentioned Alice Gilsland as being there, and said how thoroughly satisfied were her aunts with her improvement and progress. Lady Georgiana did not, however, encourage the suggestion, but replied rather abruptly that she did not approve of schools for girls; whereon it was explained to her that Mary Cornwell's establishment could not properly be called a *school*, seeing that she only took six pupils, and, with the assistance of masters, educated them entirely herself.

It was at the name of *Alice* that Oliver Warleigh eagerly advanced his head, staring at Rachel, and asking, "Who, who are you talking about—*Annis* what?" He constantly repeated the first words of his sentences like that peremptory "Who, who?"

"No one you know, Oliver—*Alice* is a very common name; your ears deceived you," interposed his wife. "In this instance it only

belongs to a little niece of Mrs. Sara Grandage, Rachel's godmamma." As Rachel saw that she did not wish him to talk—for talking always excited him—she did not correct Lady Georgiana's misstatement, but let it pass as immaterial, and Oliver soon relapsed into his usual condition of half-drowsy quiescence.

The similarity in sound to the well-remembered name of Sir Laurence's lost daughter had struck on that jarred chord in his memory which gave way when his life was all unbinged by the disappointment of his hasty and greedy ambition, awakening in him a sort of galvanic interest, but it did not last long; his wife's voice was sufficient to quell it. They seemed to Rachel more peculiar in their ways than ever. She loathed Oliver once, and now she could only feel compassion for him as he sat by her half alive; noticing nothing of the beautiful objects gathered around them, and less than nothing of the incessant crowd passing to and fro.

They were left together to rest for a time, Oliver Warleigh, Lady Georgiana, and herself, on a seat near the crystal fountain, and while they were talking, Rachel espied the tall head of Sinclair Ferrand above the crowd, and a minute or two afterward he approached quite near, Alice Gilsland's straw poke bonnet rising nearly to his shoulder, and turning hither and thither in genuine girlish curiosity and excitement. Alice perceived Rachel and nodded, then advanced quickly with Sinclair and asked if by any chance she had seen the doctor—they had lost him in the crowd; Rachel said she had not, and the next moment the young folks were gone.

"How frightfully that girl is dressed," remarked Lady Georgiana in her hard voice—her voice and her visage both had grown harder and colder than they even used to be. Rachel was just on the point of explaining to her that the girl was Alice Gilsland of whom she had been speaking a few minutes before, when Lady Georgiana's attention was called away from her to her husband, who, with a deathly pallor on his face, was struggling to rise.

"Be still, Oliver," said his wife in a low, stern tone, and he was quiet in an instant, but staring and wild as if he had seen a ghost. "You are tired and want to go," she added more gently as if she were addressing a child that needed soothing. "Have a little patience until Laurence comes back or John Withers to help you through the crowd, and then we will leave." They had to wait full half an hour, however, before either appeared, and during that interval his faintness increased so much that when his brother arrived he had to be placed in a Bath-chair and wheeled out of the building to the carriage, being quite unable to support himself. He was a sad, forlorn object, and Sir Laurence was as tender as a woman over him in his broken-down condition. Every remembrance of former wrong seemed to have passed out of mind between them.

They had not been gone many minutes when Mrs. Sara Grandage joined her goddaughter with John Withers, he having piloted her through the sculpture court with great difficulty. Katherine was there still with her nephew Mortimer, but Bittersweet had seen enough

for one day, and would only rest half an hour while John pioneered his sister through the crush from which she had just emerged. Returning to her afterward, Rachel again fell in with Sinclair Ferrand and Alice Gilsland, when Alice proclaimed with decision that she liked the "Amazon" better than any thing else there was to be seen, and she was going to look at it again for the last time before leaving. She then nodded and went gayly off on Sinclair's arm, looking as proud and happy as a queen.

"She reminds me of somebody I have seen somewhere, but I can not think who it is," said Rachel as she passed on with John. "But I wonder what end Miss Delia Ferrand proposes to gain by disguising her in that checked gingham gown and poke bonnet half a yard deep—she seems a simple child enough."

John Withers made some inarticulate response—he had not noticed Miss Alice Gilsland.

IV.

While they were in London Mrs. Sara Grandage graciously spared her goddaughter for a couple of days that she might spend them with her old friend Miss Cornwell. Rachel found the time very pleasant and greatly enjoyed it, most of all perhaps because it reminded her of the season when she was young herself. Miss Cornwell loved her vocation of teaching and had been very prosperous in it. Rachel regretted not having succeeded in doing her a good turn with Lady-Georgiana, for she felt sure little indolent Miss Clara would have reaped many advantages under Mary's care which she could not have at home; and Mary had a vacancy just now. Her pupils were only five in number, and Alice Gilsland was the youngest but one.

The first evening of her visit, Rachel was invited into the school-room to hear the "subjects" read, and she accepted the proffered entertainment with glee, remembering what a favorite exercise of hers were these same "subjects" in the blissful salad days when she spelt *beautiful* with a big B and thought it more impressive.

The girls were a pleasing group enough, and this was a high moment in which to contemplate them. Being accommodated with a low chair by a window opening on the bright garden, Rachel looked out and listened and criticised quite at her ease, and felt like fifteen again, minus the secret torture of waiting to hear her own lucubration read. Girls—even school-girls—have their little ambitions, and these subjects were here as they had formerly been with Mary Cornwell, Carrie Martin and herself, the intellectual test that conferred on each her position in her class. The eldest of the party might be eighteen, the youngest four years less, but the face amongst them all that most attracted Rachel's attention was that of Alice, who was sitting in the highest place at the long desk, opposite the teacher's chair; and the table whereon lay the five copy-books containing the subjects.

She had a bit of work before her, but her hands were idle, and her sensitive lips utterly refused to obey the restraining power which acted triumpantly enough on eyes and brow. She was in a keen and increasing state of ex-

citement, consequent, Rachel opined, on the probability of forfeiting her proud position to her neighbor; a girl of a good countenance, on whose firm mouth, and smooth, large forehead sat the confidence of a certain amount of proved power. Rachel conjectured, and rightly, that she had long been head of the class, used to reign and rule, and that to Alice the dignity was new and inexpressibly precious; but that the rivalry between them was as generous as it was open. While Alice was visibly expectant and thrilling through every nerve, Jane Grantham was outwardly calm, and drew her steady needle in and out as regularly as the beat of her pulse. Rachel could not forbear a smile when the title of the Subjects was read by Mary Cornwell; it was taken from the list in Robello's Italian Grammar, and they had written it themselves going on for a score of years ago. Oh! the high-flown magniloquence of somebody's effusion! Rachel could not have written so finely now if she had been paid a hundred guineas the page. "The Four Seasons invited to dine with Time dispute which is the most valuable to mankind," that was the beautiful name of it.

The first to be read was that of Ellen Herbert, who ranked as lowest in the class, and the only criticism vouchsafed to it was a slow shake of the head full of considerate reproof; but the dear child had evidently no more imagination than a turnip, and was quite unmoved. The next was Janet Scott's—commented on as very careless, and so it was. The third was Kate Frazer's, mildly encouraged as an improvement on her last; and these being disposed of, the teacher and pupils straightened themselves into attitudes of critical attention, and the composition of Jane Grantham was very distinctly enunciated, every eye on the reader except that of the writer. It was a clever composition for a girl of eighteen; she had a good grip of her ideas and expressed them clearly—from beginning to end it was even, accurate, not over redundant—honest work and her best. When finished it was laid down without a word, and the last was taken in hand.

"Now, Alice, for yours; let us see if you have maintained your place," said Miss Cornwell cheerfully. Rachel thought she should not have spoken then; but dear Mary, excellent and conscientious as she was, was never sympathetic. She had no conception of any pain biting at poor Jane Grantham's heart while her fate was hanging in the balance so near to be decided. Now Rachel's tenderness—and she could not help it—flowed always to those who strove but did not win—who strained for the prizes and carried off the blanks.

Alice Gilsland's face could keep no secret of emotion, and as Miss Cornwell read her theme with spirit, she betrayed palpably her longing, eager hope of success. Watching her in her growing excitement, Rachel began slowly to perceive that her face was a very lovely one both in feature, in coloring, and in expression. Young eyes are generally beautiful, and hers were peculiarly innocent, limpid and soft, dark in shadow, in the light a deep bluish gray, with black lashes and brows nearly level above them; her skin was creamy-tinted and exquisitely glossy and pure, looking perhaps fairer than it was because the rich cable rolls of her hair were a

dark russet-tinged brown. The changes that passed over her countenance during the twenty minutes that her subject took to read, were noteworthy as studies of temper and character, and when Miss Cornwell closed the copy-book with the significant, conclusive remark that, "They must stand as they were," the sunshine that poured all over it was marvelous for its expression of delight without triumph, and of gladness that has not yet realized how it is founded on another's pain and disappointment.

Miss Cornwell's decision was undeniably just. A pretty fanciful piece Alice had made of her theme, with only one blunder in the shape of a mixed metaphor, beginning in a ship, and ending in a star; but this flaw notwithstanding, it was far more striking and original than Jane Grantham's careful composition. Jane herself looked up from her needle, nodded at Alice, and said, "Yes," in immediate and frank acquiescence with the verdict. A generous tempered girl, thought Rachel; but young folks are mostly generous.

The reading of the subjects over, and the fiat pronounced, the girls dispersed themselves into the garden, Alice Gilsland and Jane Grantham pairing off together. Rachel wondered what they talked about. She remembered suffering a similar defeat in her own person, and what a terror she had felt lest she should have her pangs misinterpreted into spite, vexation or envy—not that Carrie Martin could ever have so interpreted them, but other girls. When she heard people dilate on the miseries of human life, her imagination always went back first to the trials of quite early days; and she thought they had been as bad to bear as any, if not worse. One has not begun to understand the theory of compensations then, and the present object, be it bright or sad, fills the sky to the horizon. Grown older we stand higher, and perceive that all things have a limit; even the most exquisite anguish is intermittent, and the most exquisite joy is underlaid with a sense of passing away.

Late in the evening the young folks all re-assembled at tea, and Rachel found herself placed directly opposite to Alice, who was at Miss Cornwell's left hand. She looked brilliant and happy, and talked more than any body for a little while, when she ceased suddenly, and a few moments after, her teacher said, touching her hand at the same time to recall her to herself, "My dear child, I wish you would not fix your eyes on people in that vague way—you are enough to stare Miss Withers out of countenance." Rachel was not observing her at the moment, but hearing this admonition she looked up just in time to intercept the dreamy gaze as it was fading from Alice's eyes. She gave her head an impatient shake, drew a long breath; and as Miss Cornwell added in a lower tone, "It is rude, my dear; you should not forget yourself," she applied herself to munching bread and butter like the healthy, hearty school-girl she was; but Rachel did not again hear her pleasant voice chiming above others with a silvery ring in the conversation round the tea-table.

Miss Cornwell, who knew her friend's old trials, and why she might feel a special interest in Alice Gilsland, told her afterward that the child had given her plenty of trouble to manage, and that it was still mighty hard work to teach her any thing she did not wish to learn.

Miss Delia Ferrand had not found her darling experiment of bringing up a child so easy as she had anticipated. For Alice, in addition to her strong will, had a passionate conscience, and many an hour's willful naughtiness was followed up by morbid anguishes of self-reproach before, by the advice of sounder judgments than their own, the ladies of Brookfall were prevailed on to transfer their capricious *protégée* to the care of Miss Cornwell. Under her Alice had improved in docility; for Mary had discretion, and evaded coming to open issue with her on points where her temper was determined. An appeal to her affections was the surest way to move her—against a threat she would obstinately and utterly revolt. She was very loving where she set her heart, and of a genuine, canine fidelity; but her antipathies were equally strong.

To Sinclair Ferrand she was devoted; when she was quite a little thing, and nobody else could control her, he with a caress and a few words of petting could make her as good as gold; and the same influence he exercised over her still. But to the sound of her uncle Gilsland's name she had the keenest aversion; and when he claimed to see her, as he did now periodically, it was only from a knowledge that Miss Cornwell's eye was on her behavior, that she could prevail on herself to speak to him with the ordinary forms of courtesy; and the ruffling effect of his visits was visible in her temper for a week after.

Mr. Gilsland was now, as Katherine had told Rachel, the fashionable preacher of a fashionable congregation in London, and to this Miss Cornwell added the information that he was recently married to a member of it—a wealthy widow of mature experience and good position. Thus he had at last achieved the objects of his darling ambition. He was popular, he was notorious, and he was rich; but his reputation for sanctity of life and purity of doctrine did not stand high in the esteem of the respectable and the orthodox; and his tradesmen spoke of him querulously as the worst paymaster on their books. He lived at a great rate in an exclusive quarter of the town, and cut such a figure in a certain pseudo-pious clique, that many people went to see and hear him from curiosity, as they would have gone to see and hear any other mountebank. Mrs. Sara Grandage took a carriage and went, Hanson accompanying her; for Rachel refused to do it on the plea that good words out of the mouth of such a preacher always did her harm, and that she could not have listened to him with any proper Sunday feelings. Many persons, more acute than Rachel, said the fashionable preacher was like his famous prototype, Mr. Sterne, in his discourses; others again thought he had fatally missed his vocation when he betook himself to the pulpit instead of to the stage. He was altogether an exceptional character, an anomaly amongst his order, who girded at him very often and very sternly; perhaps he would have left it had he been able; he was reported to have said once that his gown was no better than a domino, and that his hands kept him strangling *en permanence*.

V.

Her attempted avoidance of Mr. Gilsland notwithstanding, Rachel Withers fell in with him a few days after leaving Miss Cornwell's, under

very unexpected circumstances. Mrs. Sara Grandage desired to pay her respects to Lady Georgiana Warleigh before leaving town, and she carried her goddaughter with her on the occasion. When they were ushered into the drawing-room, there was Mr. Gilsland, sitting in confidential talk, which their entrance abruptly checked in mid-flow. He wore an indefinitely insolent air under the sentimental saintliness which it seemed his present cue to assume, and it needed no special acuteness to detect that the interview between them was far from being agreeable to Lady Georgiana. Two red and angry patches stained her cheeks, and her light eyes were glittering with a passionate expression of vexation which she could not at once dissemble.

She received her visitors with some demonstration, and was about to perform the ceremony of introduction between them and Mr. Gilsland, when Bittersweet saved her the trouble by challenging him herself, and congratulating him on his social and public successes in her peculiar vein of half-earnest irony; he did indeed look as handsome and thriving as good health, good living, and a good tailor could make him, and that was *very* well—picturesquely clerical. But the mask was off his face for Rachel altogether now; and she could only draw an uncomfortable parallel between his present appearance, and his appearance on the last occasion when she had seen him; which was at the door of Welsbeck rectory just before his first wife died.

Every detail of this scene and of others at the same period sprang up vividly before her mind's eye, and betrayed her into some awkwardness and confusion of manner; but Mr. Gilsland never lost his countenance for an instant; he engaged in a conversation with Bittersweet as airily and gracefully as if he had taken her in to dinner the night before in the height of good-fellowship and friendship. With visible effort Lady Georgiana joined in it, and Mrs. Sara Grandage made a rather long-drawn-out visit, hoping that he would take his leave first; but he did not—he outstaid them; and they did not see Oliver Warleigh either; it was one of his bad days, Lady Georgiana said, and excused his not appearing to bid them good-by.

Mrs. Sara Grandage and Rachel both observed that Mr. Gilsland had established himself in the Oliver Warleighs' house on terms of familiar intimacy; but what could be the link between two people so dissimilar as Lady Georgiana and he they were at a loss to conjecture. He was not the sort of person whom she could personally approve or admire, and she was by no means of that gushing devotional turn of mind which is apt to betake itself to the feet of fashionable preachers. She was a very shrewd woman for detecting shams, yet here was she seen on the closest terms of acquaintance with the most conspicuous Tartuffe of the day.

As they were going away Bittersweet, who was not usually observant of details, could not help remarking to her goddaughter on the appearance of poverty which every thing surrounding the Oliver Warleighs wore. Their lodgings were inconvenient for situation, and they were also ill-furnished and ill-served; but they continued in them on the plea that the po-

sition was healthy, quiet, and out of the way. Out of the way it certainly was; for the driver of the hired brougham which carried them there took half an hour or more in seeking the house.

Rachel Withers enjoyed as much diversity in her visit to London as she was capable of enjoying. She saw all the regular sights,—theaters, operas, picture-galleries, exhibitions, and museums; but hers was not a mind that would bear many new ideas at a time. She saw by glimpses some of its laborious gayety too, and thanked her stars that she was not bound to slave in *that* mill. She had found many a country dinner-party amongst friends and neighbors quite as lively and entertaining as a crowded "at home" in Bayswater. When she was young she would have walked barefoot, or with unboiled peas in her shoes a considerable distance to behold the writers of her favorite books; perhaps her curiosity was a little cooled down now, but still when her godmother announced that she had received a card from her ancient friend, Mrs. Conolly, for one of her æsthetic teas, she felt exceedingly glad, and enjoyed some of the sweetest pleasures of anticipation in looking forward to the evening.

And it was amusing, though nobody looked much amused. Standing about in close rooms is uneasy work for those new to it; Rachel found it so. She had no precise expectations as to what she should see and hear, but she still, in her ignorant, countrified imagination, did fancy it would be something decidedly worth remembering. None of the great gods were present, but there were several good artists, several minor authors, and one important little critic who was a pink of neatness. Also, there were foreigners of many nations, and learned ladies not a few. Amongst others there was Mrs. Lipscomb, whose books for children were Rachel's early delight, ample and gracious, with sweet words on her tongue, and a jewel on her forehead; there was a French poetess of unpoetical proportions, and a young lady novelist, slender, graceful, and gushing. Then she heard the exquisite drawl of a very fine gentleman telling two fine ladies how he had "harnessed the donkey before the horse," but what came of the arrangement was lost to her; then she heard the critic speak to a friend and probable coadjutor on some forthcoming "slaughter of the innocents," which she interpreted to mean, 'cutting up of the minor poets. And a very white hand presented her with a cup of tea, and the person to whom the hand belonged was that light of the pulpit and drawing-room saint, Mr. Gilsland. She was better pleased to see her old friend and school-fellow Carrie Martin, who dropped in for a few minutes after the opera, quizzed Rachel on her innocent bewilderment in the novel scene, yawned and went her way home to bed.

After that, Rachel was not sorry to go too; she saw how entertaining the entertainment might be to those who understood the mystery of it, which she did not; but Bittersweet, remarking afterward that these gatherings at Mrs. Conolly's were not nearly so good as twenty or thirty years ago, she excused herself for finding it rather dull, and thought perhaps she had reason for the opinion.

The next day she betook herself to visit Carrie Martin, one of the very few remaining to

her of the band of enthusiastic friends with whom she corresponded at the date of her return to Hurtleale with John, now nearly seventeen years ago. They exchanged letters and kept up their intimacy still. Carrie Martin had settled herself in London, and was leading a life quite to her own taste—free and laborious in the direction that suited her. It was always predicted amongst her young companions that she would turn out something odd, and here was she now a genuine specimen of the literary working-woman—writing to order on such uninteresting subjects as strikes, pawnbroking, early closing, and sanitary reform, and doing it well too—so well that her articles were one and all credited to a masculine hand. Rachel felt no awe of her wisdom, but was very fond of Carrie on the principle of opposites agreeing; for no two persons could have been more dissimilar.

Bittersweet, who now saw her goddaughter's quaint friend for the first time, was half-disposed to be angry with her for keeping Carrie's virtues all these years to herself; the vivacious old lady was charmed with the younger one, and they would sit and talk together about the world and its ways in a satirical strain that was enough to make quiet folks' hair bristle. They were like flint and steel striking out sparks, and fring the tinder of all manner of flimsy fashions and prejudices.

The result of the acquaintance was an invitation to Carrie to visit Prior's Bank in the autumn; in the mean while, Mrs. Sara Grandage and Rachel were going down to Claymire for a month while Alice was at Brookfall for her holidays, and before Sinclair Ferrand set off for his year's tour in Egypt and Syria. The opportunity of being at Claymire while these two were at home was thought by the excellent aunts quite inducement enough to bring their cousin Sara down into Devonshire; and when she was tired of town, thither she turned her steps with Rachel, Clip, and Hanson in attendance, and took possession of the same lodgings as she had occupied on the occasion of her previous visit ten years before.

CHAPTER THE THIRD.

THE SUNSHINE OF BROOKFALL.

A CREATURE not too bright or good
For human nature's daily food;
For transient sorrow's simple wiles,
Praise, blame, love, kisses, tears, and smiles.

WORDSWORTH.

L

THERE were few places prettier or more thoroughly English in home character than the cottage at Brookfall when summer was in its prime. In winter it was too much alone and looked desolate under the shadow of the down, but on a June morning it was like a picture out of romance-land with its wealth of flowers and fantastic overgrowth on thatched gable and rustic verandah. The brook ran down with diminished force at this time of year, but the miniature cascade was so lovely amongst the fresh ferns and airy silver birches that Rachel Withers stood watching its foamy gambols for ever so long, and thinking how the waters come down at Lo-

dore; all waters are akin and have family features of resemblance, for this little Fall was as merry and frolicsome in its play as was ever its big brother of the North.

Miss Delia Ferrand espied her from the drawing-room window, and appearing in the garden, joined her where she loitered. The elder lady was looking admirably cheerful, and announced even before they had shaken hands or gone through any of the preliminaries of meeting, that their dear girl was coming home on the morrow—the best of news this at Brookfall, for it was never so pleasant as when its Sunshine was there. They then walked up to the house together, exchanging chat until they came to the plot where Miss Flora was busy amongst her flowers. She raised herself stiffly erect to repeat her sister's tidings, and for the next ten minutes the two old ladies talked rapidly one against the other, the beginning, the middle, and the end of their excited discourse being the virtues, the charms, and the manifold accomplishments of their darling. They had apparently forgotten the fact that Rachel had seen her in town; but it was very amusing to hear them trying to be judicious in their affectionate enthusiasm, each softly qualifying the other's praises until between them Alice came out a bundle of sheer contradictions and inconsistencies.

"She has the sweetest temper in the world," said Miss Flora, which eulogy Miss Delia immediately moderated by adding, "but warm, Flo'—on occasion even very warm!"

"So much the better," was the response, "I do not like your tepid, negative characters that never flashed out." Then: "She is certainly pretty—I am not one of those who profess to make no account of beauty, because it is only skin deep; and as for her figure, it is grace itself."

"Rather angular, Flo', rather angular as yet!" interposed Miss Delia, viewing her own comely contours with an air of connoisseurship.

"What of that? She has the framework of an elegant symmetry, and will be all the handsomer by and by for being pointed now—what do you expect at fifteen? Not that she should be rounded into full beauty, surely?"

"Her voice is delicious, her music is excellent, her French accent is beyond reproach, her letters are the most amusing that were ever read;" and so on and so on did the benevolent ladies dilate, growing fervent over their subject, and magnifying willful, madcap Alice into a very paragon before they let it drop.

They were in the height of this happy glorification when Sinclair Ferrand appeared, trampling his heedless way over the velvet lawn in his hobnails.

"Sinclair, Sinclair, can you not keep to the gravel walks?" cried his aunt Flora with hands uplifted in pathetic remonstrance. "You leave hoof-marks all over the turf." The young man paused, then made three great bounds which landed him in the midst of them, brown, breathless, and laughing. "You tiresome boy, how often must I tell you the same thing! Now then, what brings you here at this time of day?"

"Nothing particular. The doctor is gone over to a meeting at Knowle, so I have come to see

how you are getting on — and I want to know if Alice's pony is all right — is it up in the stable?" Miss Delia answered that it was, and he disappeared.

A few minutes afterward they saw him leading the high-spirited animal into the paddock, where he gave it a canter in preparation for its young mistress's service. Miss Delia watched his maneuvers with a countenance expressive of mingled admiration and distress, slowly shaking her head from time to time, and saying at last with a long-drawn sigh: "It is *indeed* a pity!" Miss Flora guessed what she was thinking of, and suddenly applying herself with great vigor to an imaginary weed in a bed of verbenas, exclaimed: "It is trying — but, dear sister, we may not choose our crosses — they are sent."

"I know that," replied Miss Delia, "but still I can not help feeling it very grievous that he should be so determined on hiding his talent in the earth. When he can do any thing in the way of headwork that he wills to do, is it not cruelly unjust to himself to let his powers lie waste? I once dreamed he was going to be made archdeacon, and what is there to hinder him from attaining to that dignity, or even a higher, if he would only bethink himself and listen to reason?"

But Sinclair Ferrand was not one of those pliable characters who *will* listen to reason if it go against the bias of their nature. He was not planned for a bookworm, and a bookworm he would never become, notwithstanding his father's example and his own university successes. It was to the intense mortification and disappointment of his worthy aunts that he still adhered to his refusal to enter the church, where they thought a young man was most safe from the dangers and temptations of this wicked world; although Miss Delia innocently betrayed that she had still an eye to the pomps and prizes therein to be won. If the doctor shared their regret, he kept it to himself. The young man was independent of work and fortune, and might well gratify his desire for a traveler's life. Already he had walked half over Scotland, Ireland, Wales, and our own romantic north and south-western counties; he had been in Spain and Italy, and was going to the East next month. His leading-strings were loosed for good now, and could never be put on again by the most pious and persistent of old ladies; he was five and twenty, master of himself, and of a sufficient income from his mother's fortune, besides a liberal allowance from his father. Brook-fall and Prior's Bank must both ultimately become his own, and meanwhile he was free as a bird on the wing; coming and going as he listed — but generally as Alice came and went. He was a tawny, powerful young giant to look at, built to grapple with strange perils by forest and wilderness, but the fact that he had high mental powers besides only made his resolution to run away from the ambitious chances of civilized life the greater grief to the proud and affectionate aunts. The men of their family had all been scholars.

Mrs. Sara Grandage, for her part, sympathized in his election. A life of adventure must be delightful. One imagines poetry in that; while the successful careers of the great wisecracks at

home, come they to ever such fame and dignity, are built up chiefly of prose, prose, prose! The most envied and powerful of them all must labor as hard as a galley-slave chained to his oar, and feel perhaps sometimes as little love for their labor.

II.

A day or two after Alice came home to Brook-fall for her holidays, Rachel Withers walked up thither to tea by invitation; her godmamma preferred remaining alone — Miss Delia had been with her, talking all the morning. Just as they were sitting down to table, in dropped quite unexpectedly Mr. Wallis, from Knowle, and joined the feminine group, not entirely to the satisfaction of the younger members of it; for he was one of those men who, wherever he went, left ruffled sensations, gloom, and discouragement behind him. He was Alice's peculiar aversion, for she always thought he aggravated Sinclair's delinquencies, and vexed his aunts on his account more than every other person and circumstance added together. He began in his usual way by inquiring what were the young man's plans for his next wild-geese chase.

"Nothing is changed of them since we saw you last — he leaves England again next month," replied Miss Delia tragically.

"It has struck me lately that his views are unsettled," said Mr. Wallis lugubriously. "Is he getting any ideas of *Rome* into his head? He is full of the pride of his secular knowledge, and if he does not go over to Popery, mark my words, he will go over to *nothing* — *he will go over to nothing* — which so many young men are doing."

"No need to fear either the one or the other," replied Miss Flora with spirit. "His feelings are genuine and his judgment is sound. He will not easily be beguiled or misled. I have faith in Sinclair's principles, his sense, and his training."

"They are just blind guides — blind guides, my friend, nothing better! If he felt himself weak, ignorant, uncultured, dull, I should have ten times more reliance on his stability. It is your fine minds that most often go astray."

"*There* I believe you," murmured Miss Delia sorrowfully; "*there* indeed I believe you." It is marvelous in what nonsense people will acquiesce if it be only advanced with the voice of authority.

When Mr. Wallis was gone, Miss Delia proceeded to expatiate on some of his texts, with a considerable amount of self-contradiction; for it was patent to all the world that she was as proud as possible of her nephew's university honors, though at this moment she professed to regard them as his most dangerous snare.

"If he had failed when he went up for his degree, perhaps the humiliation might have been for his good," said she sadly; "failure is good for all of us, but especially it might have been good for him!"

"Oh, auntie Dee, how can you say so, when it would have made him ashamed and unhappy?" cried Alice, uplifting the voice of keen remonstrance. "And it would have grieved you too, and disappointed the doctor. You would have accused him of idleness then — but

he worked hard and deserved what he won. He is fifty times nicer and wiser as he is than if he were made into a copy of *that* Mr. Wallis!"

"You are speaking foolishly, Alice. Nobody wishes to see Sinclair other than he is except *better*; and even you, silly child, will not dare to say he is without need of improvement. 'Learning puffeth up.'"

"But he is not puffed up! he is quite as simple as ever he was. Little wits are puffed up, but nothing could make our Sinclair so small as to be conceited. Really wise men are never conceited."

"I did not say they were; but Sinclair is not a *really* wise man. He is out of boyhood certainly, but in character, experience, and knowledge of the serious responsibilities of life he is almost as much a baby as yourself."

"Would you like his hair to turn gray in a single night, aunt Delia? You have told me often we go on learning every hour we live."

"So we do, Sunshine, so we do," interposed Miss Flora. "We must give Sinclair time; if he be wayward and too firmly set on his own will now, a few years may alter him. We would rather have kept him safe amongst us, and have seen him following soberly in his father's steps, but with the eagerness of youth for variety he is bent on spending what we think an unprofitable life. We deplore his taste, but none of us would be justified in demanding from him a complete sacrifice of it. Perhaps when he is older, and we are quite old, he may return home and settle peaceably."

"What I feel most is that he should throw himself away," said Miss Delia, returning to the charge. "If he had been wooden-spoon or whatever they call the last man on the list, he could have ridden and rowed over the world just as well as a wrangler. It is like so much labor lost. When he was a little boy in ankle-straps I set my heart on his taking orders and doing his Father's work in the vineyard; when he went to Rugby my thoughts went with him, and to Cambridge also, though by that time he had begun to manifest his strangely restless propensities. Still I hoped even against hope, and made it the theme of many prayers until the dear doctor, in announcing to us his son's degree, warned us that we must give up looking to see him ever a minister of the Gospel. No one can imagine what my disappointment has been and is; for besides being his aunt, I am also his godmother, and it seems as if I had failed in the performance of my duty toward him."

"Failure is good for all of us," murmured Alice, mischievously applying Miss Delia's words to her own case, and feeling the moment she had done so that she had done naughtily. In a spasm of tender remorse she began immediately to caress and kiss the worthy old lady, protested that she did not mean it, that she wished Sinclair could travel to please himself and at the same time stay at home to please them; and then by way of getting quite clear of the subject, she diverged unexpectedly to the very objectionable lilac tint of her auntie's cap-ribbons, pronouncing it ugly, washed-out, and with no sense in it. Miss Delia accepted the *amende* very affectionately, and then suggested a chapter from a tedious spiritual biography to close

the discussion, which it did most effectually, for at the first word, Alice evaporated, whether by door or window nobody was alert enough to notice, leaving her aunts and Rachel Withers to enjoy the improving work by themselves.

As Rachel was going home an hour later, she met Alice walking back to Brookfall under the convoy of the doctor and his son, a wreath of black briony twined round her hat and a gigantic fern-spray in her hand. She looked very bonnie, very fantastic, and in very high spirits, and had apparently quite forgotten all the serious part of the evening. When she forsook her aunt's society, she had betaken herself to the rectory in quest of more cheerful company than theirs, made heavier by the Reverend Joseph Woolley's story; for when they met Rachel the doctor asked her if the biography had been shelved for the night, and Alice with a naughty sparkle in her eyes, added,—

"If it is not I shall stay out in the shrubbery; it is too dull and affected to be borne."

"Tut, tut, little Miss Critic!" cried the doctor. "Speak reverently of reverend persons. Joseph Woolley was no doubt a valuable man in his way."

"But I don't like his way; there is too much whine in it," retorted she. "It reads as if the person who wrote it was crying all the time; and he takes such trouble to prove that this is a wicked, miserable world, when he had really a great share of good luck in it, and met with kind friends wherever he went. If he had been one of the poor starved curates with ten children he might have bemoaned himself, but his living at Swineford was very fat. Do you know, I believe he was too well off from the beginning to the end of his life ever to be quite aware of it."

"What fern is this, you minute cynic? Exercise your young wits on the vegetable kingdom awhile longer, before you begin to give out your views on human nature," said the doctor. "What do you know about it?"

"No more than what I learn from the spiritual biographers," replied she. "We are going through a regular course of them, so I shall be wonderfully wise by-and-by."

"My dear Sunshine, you will always be something of a goose," the doctor rejoined; and so they shook hands with Rachel and parted, Alice still catching the last word and saying, that goose though she might be, not one pen-feather of hers should ever fall into the fingers of religious biographers.

In this little colloquy Alice betrayed one of her perversities which was almost more than all the rest distressing to the excellent ladies at Brookfall. They had brought her up as far as they were able on an exclusive diet of good books—no stories, legendary lore, fairy-tales or secular poetry had been allowed to her at home; Mary Cornwell gave a wider range—Scott and Shakespeare were found on her study shelves and not forbidden; and the consequences were now appearing in Alice's disgust at the colorless, prosy literature which was chiefly patronized at Brookfall. She was an imaginative girl, her mind was growing, and on the spare and meager food then afforded to it, it would not grow straight; Miss Delia during these present holidays was systematically doing her endeavors to nip all the child's flowers of fancy

in the bud, and the result was a breaking forth in a much worse direction—sarcasm was blooming on the pretty lips of fifteen in a very unusual fashion, surprising, hurting and shocking her friends continually; for nature will out in one shape or another, tread its strength down as resolutely as we will. It is a blessing to women to be possessed of fair intellectual culture, and with a little unprejudiced direction Alice would have acquired it well and wisely; as it was, she got it by hook and by crook, and in spite of hindrances, but not without many a serious difficulty with her aunts.

III.

One evening again soon after this, Mrs. Sara Grandage and her goddaughter having spent the day at Brookfall, Rachel ended it by going up into the glen wood with Miss Delia and Alice—Alice being in one of her freakish moods, when she was pleasantly disposed to make believe all manner of nonsense, and to ruffle her aunt's sobriety most teasingly. But let her be ever so worrying, it was almost impossible to be cross with her. Miss Delia looked exceedingly solemn before they set out, and shook her head disapprovingly whenever Alice glanced at her, which the provoking puss did very often, and in her most provoking way; and when they had got deep into the wood, and the excellent old lady was half-way through some good discourse of no particular tendency, she audaciously proposed that they should have a fairy hunt!

"It is broad daylight yet, and they have all got fernseed and walk invisible; but don't be discouraged, auntie Dee," cried she, with a demure air of seriousness, "only follow where I lead, and we are sure to come on some traces of them." And then she marshaled her elders through a tangle of ferns and bushes, turning her little crazy pate every now and then to admonish them of matters concerning their safety. "Take care where you step," cried she, with warning gesture; "there, in that gray lichen cup lurks a sparkish fellow, who would fain trip you up ignominiously upon this hidden stone, wrought over with exquisite fretwork of moss. Do not snatch heedlessly at any floating sprays, or the willful elves that cluster in every blossom may punish your temerity with a thorn in your palm; but especially take heed to your eyes, for that wicked bramble with the hooked spines likes nothing better than to dash himself in the faces of curious explorers, and cause them to turn back, lest they should discover the secret clue that leads to fairy queen's bower."

"What a chatterbox it is!" ejaculated Miss Delia. "I wish bramble would catch you!"

"No chance of it," retorted Alice. "He piques himself mightily on his fidelity, and guards the approaches to the labyrinth with jealous care, but if we go warily and creep low we shall outwit him yet; strong, and tough, and well-armed as he fancies himself." And here, being heedless of where she went, she almost fell over the bared root of a tree, recovering herself with some difficulty, just in time to avoid stumbling against Sinclair Ferland, who was returning from Knowle through the glen wood. The sun was now going down,

so they joined him and all went on their way home together—the two young ones in advance, and rejoicing apparently in each other's company.

Miss Delia had betrayed by an unusual silence ever since she started out for the walk that she had a heavy burden on her mind, and as soon as Alice and her nephew were beyond ear-shot, she opened it to Rachel with a woeful gravity.

"Sunshine's nonsense is longer than her tongue—far longer," said she, in a voice that almost faltered. "Flora and I have often speculated what she does with a pen in her hand so often, and now we have found out—she composes."

Rachel received the painful intelligence with becoming seriousness. "*She composes!*" echoed the quiet body, at a loss for other words adequate to the occasion, and thinking all the while that her friend Mary Cornwell was to blame for giving encouragement to this pernicious tendency.

"Yes;" and Miss Delia waved her head dolorously.

"Poetry?" then suggested Rachel in the tone of an anxious inquirer.

"No, worse—they get over poetry," was the answer. "If you will not mind the wasted time I should like you to read it. The discovery has been almost too much for dear Flora. She thinks, and so do I, that if the child can break out into such fantastic rigmaroles after the careful bringing up she has had here, there is a very bad prospect before her if the day should ever come when she must turn her talents to something profitable." And here the distressed old lady drew from her pocket a tiny manuscript roll, which Rachel weighed in her hand as one way of testing its merits, and finding it very light, she said reassuringly that, at all events, there was not much of it.

"Not much of it," repeated Miss Delia grievously; "there had not need be much! Fays, and elves, and sprites, and all sorts of nonsense! Where she has got her ideas from it is quite impossible to guess. Neither Flora nor I can charge it upon our consciences that we ever put a fairy-tale into her hands in her life. We disapprove of works of fiction and imagination so strongly, that I could find in my heart to wish there had never been one written! I must write to Miss Cornwell to desire her to exercise a much stricter supervision over the child's leisure reading than she has done; for I am sure she has had hold of books she ought not—who knows but they may have been novels?"

Rachel, who was very far from sharing this prejudice, tried to insinuate that when young folks show a decided hankering after that kind of mental refreshment it would perhaps be wise to gratify them with a judicious selection; but Miss Delia only sighed and shook her head again, being too deeply depressed to argue the question at all just then. Rachel therefore carried home Alice's little fantasia and read it for her godmamma's amusement. They both laughed over it heartily, and Bittersweet fully appreciated her cousin Delia's horror when she discovered her *protégée's* leisure trifling. The

damsel, at school or elsewhere, had clearly enjoyed her readings of Shakspeare, Spenser, and others; for she had stolen the names of some of the fairies of old, and set them to their mid-summer sports with new ones of their kin to whom she herself had stood godmother, giving them all manner of fantastical titles.

But though it was a high transgression of their rules, it was impossible to avoid thinking that the excellent old ladies at Brookfall treated Alice's fanciful escapade with much more seriousness than it deserved. The sparkling little person received a solemn lecture one morning shortly after she was found out in the presence of Mrs. Sara Grandage and Rachel Withers, which they were bound to acknowledge had no more effect on her than was—to be expected. She looked droll, and heaved big, weariful sighs, and beat impatiently on the floor with her foot, and was all over one quiver of fun and vivacity when they began; but the good aunts were too deeply wounded in their pet prejudices to allow her to triumph over them in her usual despotic fashion.

"We wish you to lay it to heart, dear Alice, that no profit can ever come out of such idleness as this," said Miss Delia, tapping the edge of the table with the tiny manuscript roll, and then using it to rub her dear old nose, on which a fly had perched for a moment. "Reflect on the value of time—once wasted, we can never redeem it. What does the busy bee in the hymn teach you? And then think of the necessity there is that you should be *solid*."

Here Alice seemed very much depressed, and deliberately pricked her forefinger with a brier till it bled. "What mischief is the child after now?" interposed Miss Flora, detecting her in the act. "Solid, indeed, expect *her* to be solid! Ask foam to be solid! She is much more like one of her own whimsical sprites. By the by, Alice, have you gone on with the biography of the Reverend Joseph Woolley, as I desired you to do?"

Alice hesitated, her lips twittered, then broke into an irrepressible smile as she said, Yes, she had.

"And have you tried the profitable exercise I suggested—have you epitomized any portion of it?" To this also Alice answered, "Yes." "Let me see it, my pet, bring it here at once; now I shall begin to have some hope for you!" Miss Flora spoke in a cheerful tone, and Miss Delia's countenance brightened while the culprit went to fetch the fruits of her obedience.

She was absent several minutes, and when she reappeared the struggle of pretty audaciousness and terror in her face was most amusing. She darted a queer glance at Bittersweet, whose sympathy she saw she had enlisted, and then, standing demurely in front of Miss Flora's table, presented her offering. Miss Flora immediately rubbed her spectacles and put them on, and with a pleased expression began to peruse the written page. At first she looked puzzled, then startled, and finally she dropped the paper as if it burnt her fingers, exclaiming with tears in her voice, "Oh! you wicked puss, how did you *dare*?"

"What has she done?" gasped Miss Delia.

"She has put it into blank verse. Read it sister dear!" and Miss Delia read:

This is the story, true and long and prosy,
Of a good man who lately lived and died.
Barren it is of incident or wit,
And dull as death proverbial.
Once he was wicked, moderately so,
Never outraging crisp proprieties
With rampant vice; but wicked as are all,
"A miserable sinner" in the common sense.
He had the noblest mind, the purest heart,
That e'er embellished Christian character.
His countenance was intellectual, full of grace,
Humble, benignant, gentle, kind, and grave,
His virtue strict, but sweetly amiable!
High-bred and courteous, and a scholar he,
Who leant to skeptics when he was a youth,
But in maturer years embraced the truth.

"Stop, Delia, stop, I can not bear any more of it!" cried Miss Flora, shuddering and pressing her hands over her ears.

Miss Delia laid the awful document aside with a groan, and poor Alice stood before them, looking the very picture of convicted, rebellious naughtiness; once she stretched forth her hand to repossess herself of her delectable exercise, but she only got her knuckles rapped with the paper-knife as Miss Flora laid an embargo on it and said, "No, Alice; not until after the doctor has seen it."

"And this you think a suitable preparation for your future life, do you, Alice?" asked Miss Delia, softening into Christian pity for what began to look almost like a case of unimprovable wickedness.

"I am sure I don't know," said the child, at her wits' end.

"What can you be made into with such wrong views and feelings?" urged Miss Flora.

"I will not be made into a governess," murmured Alice.

"But there is nothing else that a lady can be."

"Then I will not be a lady!" and wearing an air of desperate defiance the culprit rushed out of the room.

A few moments of grieving silence ensued, which Miss Flora broke by saying despondently, "What is to become of her?"

"It is to be hoped some good man will marry her," sighed Miss Delia.

"And a nice handful he will get!" responded her sister with plaintive irony.

And so on, and so on, they prosed until, if their two listeners had not known dear little Sunshine, they might have supposed her planned by nature to fall into all manner of mischief. The old ladies drooped now and then into these moods of discouragement about her. In their systematic judiciousness they had ever kept it before Alice's eyes that a time *might* come when she would have to depend upon and provide for herself; and to this end they had given her what they considered to be a wise education; but no one could look at the beautiful, willful girl now without seeing that she had been far too much petted and indulged ever to bear the ordeal of being thrust forth on the world on her own resources. No one was ever less fitted for it.

Dr. Ferrand's verdict on Sunshine's iniquity when he became apprised of it was not over severe. He said she must not make any more parodies of religious biographies—that was all; and advised that she should not be *permitted* to read that style of literature until she was better able to appreciate it. Decidedly the wicked lit-

the monkey gained by her wickedness; and Sinclair privately reported to Bittersweet that his father had wished she were a *boy*, when he would have taken her in hand himself and made something clever out of her. Such leniency of judgment Miss Delia regarded as extremely mischievous; and some disagreeable daily task to do being one unalterable article of her code for moral training, Alice was set now every morning to pucker a seam for an hour, which perhaps she detested more than the Woolley ordeal.

It was impossible for Rachel Withers not to sympathize in the fractious creature's feelings, and not to endeavor to ameliorate them during a brief visit she paid with her godmamma to Brookfall, by reading aloud something pleasant while Alice sewed. *Sintram* delighted her, but Miss Delia happening to overhear a little mystical bit, remarked that she did not like its tone, and begged Rachel to entertain the child with a few pages of *Proverbial Philosophy* instead. But the penitential hour was nearly up when she spoke, so Rachel just finished the chapter of *Sintram*, and then deposited it in her work-basket. Alice's hand was immediately stretched forth to take possession of the little paper-covered book, but at the same time she said: "Aunt Delia, I must read this tale to the end; I shall never rest till I do."

"You know our wishes, Alice, but it seems you do not care to please us," was the calmly reproachful answer.

"Yes, I do wish to please you; but dear, dear auntie, don't make it so hard!" pleaded Alice, by no means relinquishing her designs on the book.

"You intend to have your own way."

"I can not read *good* books forever! They make me feel wicked and satirical. Yes, they do, aunt Delia, *very*."

"That is because of your own evil, corrupt, unregenerate nature, poor child!"

"I am not evil—I am not corrupt! But what is there in Mr. Woolley, or Mr. Nully, or Mr. Tully, to amuse or instruct me?"

"I do not know who Mr. Nully and Mr. Tully are, Alice; but from Mr. Woolley you might gain lessons of patience and sobriety that you greatly need. You are in a very sad way if you do not feel the profound sinfulness of your own poor heart, and your want of help from above to cleanse and sanctify it."

Poor Alice was now in for a sermonette and she got it. Miss Delia closed her eyes, bated her breath, and prosed on for a long quarter of an hour; the child going through each phase of impatience, weariness, sullenness, and dejection which being preached at in this fashion invariably produces. At last Miss Delia made an end, when Alice laid down the book but said, with quiet resolution, "I would rather defy you than deceive you, aunt Delia, and I mean to read the story through."

Even Rachel was startled at this frank disobedience, and laid her hand on her property to remove it, but Miss Delia, making a virtue of necessity, said, "Let her have it—if you do not, Sinclair will. But in future, dear Miss Withers, bring no such books in her way. Was I not justified in saying that they are so great a temptation to the young that I could find in my heart

to wish no work of imagination had ever been written."

"No, Delia, you are not justified in saying any thing of the kind," interposed Sara Grandage, who had witnessed the scene with gradually rising displeasure. "Neither are you justified in driving Alice to revolt by laying on her restrictions that her nature will not bear. You might deal so with a stock or a stone, but not with one of her mould."

Fortunately Alice had quitted the room, for Miss Delia was too much astonished at this abrupt interference with her authority and dogmas to have her faculties ready at call for a reply. She sat dumb and did not recover from the shock of the rebuke for the whole day after. She had a great respect for her cousin Sara's common-sense and practical wisdom, and it was noticed that two or three old novels, written in the form of letters, soon afterward made their appearance in the drawing-room. Bittersweet caught the first glimpse of them, recognized there Miss Clarissa Harlowe, Miss Byron, and other friends of her youth, and counseled their immediate retirement into private life again.

"We don't lock our girls up in this generation, my dear, but we keep their thoughts as pure as may be," said she. "Richardson might be very moral reading for our mothers, but I call him a sickly writer. Alice would find him dull too—steer clear of novels before Miss Austen and Scott; if you would like me to make you out a list of amusing wholesomes, I will do it."

Miss Delia replied grievously that there was no need to trouble her—Sinclair would only be too glad to supply Alice if she was to be allowed to fill her head with bubbles; and the task was delegated to Sinclair accordingly. After this Alice might be seen any hour of the day when she was not riding, walking, or eating, with her nose buried in a book of romance or poetry; and their effect was soon perceptible in a sweetening of her temper and a softening of her propensity to sarcasm. She found the people in Miss Austen's books much more like those she knew than the lay figures in the religious biographies, and was therefore not tempted to quiz them as pretending to be better than human nature. But her general taste was for something with a higher strain of poetry in it than Miss Austen could reach; for at fifteen the world is full of promise which has all the bloom on it yet, and the chime of sweet verses makes pleasanter music at that time of life than the shrewdest prose.

IV.

But apart from her taste for light reading, Alice had other weaknesses to correct. She was very ingenious in the art of provoking—that her most cordial admirers were forced to admit.

Throughout the previous winter and spring all the world round about Knowle had been diligently embroidering screens, pen-wipers, and other odds and ends, for the restoration of the tower of the church; or rather for the bazaar which was to be held in aid of the fund for that purpose. Rachel Withers had been asked to contribute, and Alice had been made reluctantly to furnish her quota since she came home; and the spoils having now been all sent in to Miss

Delia Ferrand, as vice-president of the fancy-fair, were duly laid out in the study for the mutual inspection of the workers before being finally dispatched to Knowle, where the bazaar was to be held.

The morning after they were so arranged, the good aunts went in to admire their neighbors' beautiful handiwork, and having incautiously left Alice behind on retiring, she could not refrain her fingers from mischief. Sinclair Ferrand arrived most inopportunistically to aid her, and what did she do but dress him up into what she called a *Bazaar Trophy*—that is, she pinned him all over with cushions, anti-macassars, screens, and other wool ware, and then ushered him into the drawing-room where the aunts were sitting in the solemn state of a morning call from little Mr. More. Neither of the delinquents knew that he was there, and they both looked rather silly and abashed; for Mr. More was the prime mover of the Fancy Fair, as he was, indeed, of all public matters in the neighborhood; and being a person of rather touchy feelings he was not likely to see his last great effort made fun of without betraying his annoyance. Having entered, however, Sinclair scorned to retreat, and stood like a string-jack, his arms outstretched and dangling with frippery, a tasseled cushion on his tawny head, and his back covered with banner-screens in poppies and roses.

"Alice!" cried Miss Delia, in a voice of acute reproach.

"How do you do, Miss Alice?" said the visitor, rising with tender formality to shake hands.

"Very well, thank you," answered Alice, demure as six years old; and then giving her head a pretty confused toss, she backed into a recess of one of the windows, whither her trophy followed her, and recklessly sat down on a most elaborate piece by Miss Crispe that garnished his coat.

Mr. More looked very red and embarrassed; there was no joke in the affair to him—nothing but a deliberate insult planned and executed wholly and solely by "that red-haired young fellow," as he designated Sinclair Ferrand; for whom, nobody could guess why, he had a manifest repugnance. Sinclair perversely recovered his countenance the moment he saw how vexed the punctilious visitor was, and appealed to him with serene audacity to say whether he did not think perambulating trophies such as himself would not be a novel and attractive feature at the bazaar.

"There ought to be two of us, and we might take the money at the door," suggested he. "I would wear the cushions, screens, and heavy goods, and you might be decked out in the light gear of kettle-holders, mats, pen-wipers, and slippers."

"Are you aware of the serious ulterior object of this benevolent sale, young sir?" demanded Mr. More in a tone of pique.

"Yes, we are going to rebuild the tower of Knowle Church."

"And you think that a fit subject for mockery and ridicule? I am sorry for you."

"I am afraid Alice is most to blame," interposed Miss Flora. "Go away, Sinclair, and take off the things before they are spoilt."

Her nephew was gracefully retiring in obedience to orders when Miss Delia looking after

him, forgot for a moment his enormities in admiration of the display on his broad shoulders.

"Oh, dear! how very effective those poppies are. Stand still, Sinclair—yes, they are very effective, very handsome indeed; don't you think so, Flora? Perhaps a little more floss silk would have improved them, but it is hard to say. Now what price should you affix to that piece, Mr. More—five guineas?"

"Not less than five guineas certainly," replied he, stiffly regarding the trophy through his glasses.

"Turn round, Sinclair, let aunt Flora look at her famous cushion," said Alice, her courage beginning to revive; but Miss Flora, conscious of the visitor's cold disapproval of the spectacle cried out, "No, no;" she had seen her own cushion often enough, and they were to go away.

As the pair vanished both the old ladies smiled, but Mr. More sighed audibly.

"Children will be children," said Miss Flora with gentle consideration.

"Yes, we can not expect to put old heads on young shoulders," added Miss Delia, "though perhaps since Sinclair has taken his degree and come out a high wrangler, Sunshine should learn to treat him with more respect; but he encourages her, and that is the truth."

Perhaps it was: at all events he did not look an unwilling victim.

That was Alice's last prank at home for some time to come, however. A few days afterward Mrs. Sara Grandage and Rachel left Claymire, and carried her with them as far as London, when she was again safely deposited in Miss Cornwell's care. Sinclair Ferrand remained little more than a week behind them, and then pruned his wings for a long flight in the East. After he was gone the people at Brookfall and the rectory led a very quiet life, and would often have been thankful for a visit from him, or for a capricious gleam of their Sunshine. When they were absent no single fault they had was remembered—nothing but their youth, their brightness, and their gay company.

CHAPTER THE FOURTH.

RACHEL WITHERS MAKES A THIRD START IN LIFE.

Take her for all in all we shall not look upon her like again.

I.

WHEN Mrs. Sara Grandage and Rachel Withers went home to Prior's Bank the harvest was just beginning, and the moors were in bloom. This was Carrie Martin's leisure season, and she was glad to make her holiday with them. She staid a month, enjoying long rides, idleness, pleasant company, good books and an excellent table as a person living habitually in dull London lodgings can not help enjoying the delights of country life. When she left, the leaves were at the change, and the cold dark days of winter were advancing. But at Prior's Bank a gloomier home-cloud attended their drawing on than any outside.

Bittersweet fell ill, and about midway in November took to her room, and soon after to her bed. It began by and by to dawn on Rachel's

mind that she would never quit it again. She did not suffer pain, but she lost her strength and was quite feeble, though even then her spirits did not fail her. Dr. Beane gave it as his opinion that she would linger a long while. The slow winter wore through, spring budded, summer bloomed, and autumn faded again, and she still lived. Rachel's was a weary vigil, but she kept it with devotion. Miss Delia Ferrand and Sinclair came down into Hurtleale to see their kinswoman soon after the young man's return from the East, but Bittersweet was glad to know them gone again. Prior's Bank was dull with its mistress bed-ridden.

A second Christmas went over, and another new year began similar to the last.

One night in January Rachel sat thinking by the firelight while her godmamma lay wakeful, watching her between the curtains. Presently she was hidden to read the Address of Nature in one of Montaigne's Essays—"Que philosophe c'est apprendre à mourir," a great favorite of the old lady's, which Rachel had read so often that she knew it by heart. When it was ended they had a grave talk which Bittersweet began. Rachel would have checked her and cheered her, but she refused to be silenced. "My dear child," said she, "how little you profit by philosophy. I am going my way satisfied—I have not made out many things clearly, but enough to live by and die by. I am growing tired after traveling these seventy-eight years, and am not sorry to be within sight of rest. But now I want to know what you will do when I am gone?"

Rachel sat on the edge of the bed, her hand lying on her godmamma's white, withered fingers. She did not immediately answer, and Bittersweet, looking wistfully in her face, asked again, "What shall you do, Dumpling, when I am gone?"

Then Rachel told her she had no plans for herself—absolutely none. She fancied her old friend felt relieved; she was silent for a minute or two, and then she went on. "I should not have liked to hear you had; nobody likes their death to be made a nucleus for new plans, but mine can not be far off now, my feet are so cold; and therefore I want to give you a bit of advice, my dear. Have a home of your own. Living about amongst your kinsfolk might be pleasant for a time, but not for a permanence. As far as means go, you will be comfortably independent, and a woman has more consideration in the world and greater liberty who possesses a home of her own, than one who spends her time and her money from house to house as a hanger-on amongst friends."

True enough no doubt, Rachel allowed; but she could not play at deciding, and she hoped even against hope that the need for decision might still be far distant. Her godmamma went on again, "There is, in fact, no one who has a claim upon you, and I have been thinking if that pretty little cottage at Claymire where we lodged were your own, you might spend your winters and springs there; it is warmer than Hurtleale, and would suit you better. You are not so strong as you used to be—I often hear you coughing in the night."

Rachel let her scheme, and devise, and settle, seeing that it satisfied her; but the idea of living at Claymire chiefly did not approve itself to

her—it was too far from Katherine, John and the children. She did not say so, however, and Bittersweet taking her silence for agreement, gave a hint to her lawyer; and when she next heard of it the little cottage was hers. "I trust it may be a long while before I need to take possession," said she.

Toward the end of the month fell Rachel's birth-day, and nobody remembered it or wished her many happy returns! These anniversaries seemed to come round very fast now that she was past the confines of middle-age; and she was sometimes almost ashamed of herself for feeling so young at heart when there was a suspicious line tracing itself between her eyebrows, and her hair was all mingled with gray. But she was a comely woman at eight-and-thirty as Bittersweet predicted of her at eighteen; bright and cheerful when there was no present distress, and overflowing with ready kindness to all in need of it.

What a strangely level, easy life she had led since she was twenty, and what a flat stretched out before her in the future! It had been like gliding along a groove at a very safe, slow pace, while others whom she knew—Carrie Martin, for instance—had encountered such awful ups and downs, and expected jerks and collisions. Where Rachel had one event to recollect, Carrie had a score; and Carrie would by no means have changed fates with her she knew; she would have been dulled to death in Rachel's monotony of comfort, and Rachel would just as surely have been beaten to death in Carrie's incessant conflicts with a perverse fortune.

We do not acknowledge it early, perhaps, but when we get well on our life's journey, we most of us begin to see that we have been led by the road for which we were best shod. Rachel had murmured often at her own dull, smooth course in secret, but in the face of coming change and sorrow, she felt that God had dealt with her well and wisely in not letting her fare over rough and dangerous places too frequently. She had not the strength, the nerve, or the fortitude for a very troublesome life, and in mercy she had been spared its temptations.

II.

When March came, it was vain for Rachel to strive any longer to shut her eyes against the truth. Dear old Bittersweet was dwindling away fast. Never a day passed now that she did not refer to the time when she should be *gone*, and her god-daughter would be *alone*. Still her good spirits survived, which was more than could be said for Rachel's. There was one consolation, even for her, however—Bittersweet did not suffer either in body or in mind. She was prostrate with weakness, but she was composed. Even Miss Delia Ferrand, who came down to Prior's Bank again at this season, stood silent before her silence. Her cousin Sara never could and never did talk out her feelings whether of affection or of religion; yet she had always made her friends feel full reliance on the steadfastness of her love, and she had impressed Rachel, who was with her in her best moments, with a belief that she was a good Christian if an unobtrusive one. No power of art could have transformed her into the similitude of her excellent cousins at Brook-fall. They had been very differently brought

up, and had all their lives beheld the world through different mediums and from a different point of view. They thought her an irreligious woman; she thought them righteous overmuch—even trenching a little now and then on cant and hypocrisy. What a blessing it is that we are none of us each other's final judges!

Bittersweet clung to her old books of philosophy to the end, but she heard her Bible read too—some people fancied she never opened it; she left them in their delusion; but Rachel knew better.

"It is the soundest philosophy of all, my dear, and stick to it," said the old lady toward the last—"I stuck to it when it was no more clear to me than High Dutch, but light has glimmered out since—enough to see by. Good people are not very different at bottom, only they fight so over their dogmas that they seem really to hate each other for the love of God. Never mind religious *ideas*, Dumpling, and don't worry yourself with so-called good books; they reason all round the compass if you read enough of them, and if you do not you only get the views of a party. I do not think myself there are any parties where I am going. Do your best and trust God, my dear; there is nothing else for it; I hope I have not done you harm—Delia thinks me a scoffing old woman; but that was my rule, and it has answered—I have no reason to accuse it of failing me—none. I had some sharp trials in my youth and it alone withheld me from being a discontented, utterly miserable, perhaps wicked woman." She took breath a little while, and on Rachel's hinting that long as they had lived together she knew very little of her life, her godmamma went on: "There is not very much to know. I was married at sixteen to a man older than my father, and if I were to say I was married in payment of one of my father's debts of honor, I should probably be as near the truth as ever we can get in such transactions. He was excellent company, my husband, to every body but his wife; I was too young and simple to amuse him long, and I was only on the verge of becoming wise enough for the duty when he died. He was very charitable and serious in his later years, and the world always gave him a good word in every one of his phases. In his early and middle life he was a great rake; but he reformed when he grew weary of sinning and turned saint, proposing me to himself as a devotee—but I thought his last estate worse than his first. I used to try to provoke him by showing my lack of faith in the genuineness of his conversion, and he bore with me very philo-

sophically. Cousin Delia would say he had got a changed heart—I don't know; it always gave me an uncomfortable feeling to see him trying to circumvent his old master—Rachel, am I growing profane? Ah, my dear, I was much worse at twenty—heaven forgive me! Draw the curtains—now I'll go to sleep."

Her last words and to the last characteristic.

III.

Mrs. Sara Grandage had not misled her god-daughter as to the provision made for her in her will. Besides the cottage at Claymire, she had bequeathed to her absolutely five thousand pounds, and charged upon the Prior's Bank property was an annuity of two hundred a year for her life.

Rachel missed her dear old friend, and mourned for her sincerely. They had lived together fifteen years. She staid at Prior's Bank until the end of March, and oh! how still the house seemed of nights with the east wind blowing, and the spring rain coming down drip, drip, drip upon the gravel! She could not realize it at first, this life of hers quite alone, but she knew by experience that she should wear it by and by. The days slipped over her one by one as beads are slipped down a string; the trees budded, the days lengthened, the birds were heard in the woods, and all nature was reviving.

Dear old Bittersweet! what capital company she used to be! Sometimes Rachel could have fancied she heard her voice speaking out of her familiar place in the twilight, and saying, "Rachel, come and talk," but when she looked round the chair was empty, and its occupant passed away to her quiet lying in the beautiful churchyard on the slope of the fell.

When she left Prior's Bank finally, Rachel staid a fortnight with her brother John and his family; then she went to London to Carrie Martin for a few days, and at last to Claymire, where she arrived about the middle of April. Clip and Hanson went with her, and a niece of Hanson's as cook, and they formed her household when she made her third new start in life.

"I hope, please God, it may be the last!" said she as she laid her head down on her pillow for the first time under a roof of her own. "I hope, please God, it may be the last."

Probably it would. She had passed the date when changes are likely to occur, and she was secure of fortune. There was nothing apparent before her but to make herself contented, to do good, and to grow old; and happily for herself Rachel Withers was one of those women who can grow old gracefully.

PART FOURTH.

SEEKING.

CHAPTER THE FIRST.

ALICE'S LOVERS.

OLD Robin Gray cam a-courting to me.—*Scotch Song.*

I.

RACHEL WITHERS had lived too long with Mrs. Sara Grandage to alter her ways when she went to Claymire, but she was hardly likely to escape the well-meaning endeavors of the worthy ladies at Brookfall to convert her to their own when she was left unsupported within reach of their powers of persuasion. She enjoyed meandering through a long, slow evening with them when they would let her alone, but sometimes they were persistently prosy. It is really marvelous how little good people shrink from the responsibility of giving advice. Does it never dawn on their kind hearts that a love of authority lurks under their desire to make every body wise and happy in their own peculiar fashion? Rachel had given up being young, but they were nearly double her age, and a sentiment of respect tied her tongue, else could she often have refuted their arguments and defended her own cause sturdily. If she had done so the probability is that they would have thought her self-opinionated.

One evening she was tempted so far as to say that she had not forgotten her Church Catechism, but was trying to do her duty in that state of life to which it had pleased God to call her—that state being one of competence and quiet ease; but Miss Delia shook her head, disapproving of her rather obtrusively, and Miss Flora forthwith cited a longlist of charitable labors that she might do but did not. In vain Rachel pleaded that she had not the necessary qualifications, that no impulse moved her to undertake such and such task-work, for which she believed herself to have a natural aptitude; and, as a last word, that if Providence had meant her to be a toiler as well as a spinster, He would probably have directed her inclinations to some practical object, and not have left her to choose capriciously what she would or would not do amongst unappointed things.

She did not dare mention what, nevertheless, she suspected to be true—that if she made a little more fuss and talk over her proceedings they would bear an equal comparison with the Martha-like deeds of her neighbors; and still less did she dare to insinuate that Miss Delia's efforts to direct her spiritually, and guide her actions, appeared at her age in the guise of unwelcome and quite needless interference. But Miss Delia lived to do good; she made it her profession, and followed it up with relentless assiduity. What a pity it is that there are such multitudes of perverse people in this wicked world who don't want to be done good to, and who resent the attempt as an impertinence! Rachel Withers had experienced no inward call to engage in the service, and disliked being practiced on as a patient; it was, indeed, worthy of remark how much wickeder she felt after

Miss Delia's charges; and it is possible that a long course of them might have even made her irreverent with her tongue, after the example of Bittersweet. Fortunately for her, therefore, deliverance came soon, ere mischief was done. At Midsummer, Alice Gilsland finally left school and came home to Brookfall, "a finished gentlewoman," in Miss Cornwell's phrase, and after that event the excellent aunts had their hands full with her, and Rachel was left in comparative peace. She enjoyed the release from constant suggestion and dictation more than it is in the power of words to express.

On the very afternoon of Alice's arrival, as Rachel was returning from a wood ramble, she met her with Sinclair Ferrand riding up toward the downs for a delightful gallop already. She was grown during the two years that had elapsed since Rachel had last seen her, and was improved, if that were possible. Her face had done more than kept its promise of loveliness; she looked bright, fresh and sweet as a rose, but she carried her wild little head in the air still, and seemed as far from any serious, womanly thoughts as ever. Her blitheness of spirit, and joyous appreciation of a life that much love made very happy, gave her a rare grace and charm of manner; her gayety was a perpetual protest against gloom, and her beaming expression seemed only the natural effluence of the generous temper that had worthily won her her pretty pet name of Sunshine.

It was pleasant to watch how the elderly people cherished her and enjoyed even her little willfulnesses; and it was easy to see, by and by, who was the leading spirit at Brookfall on everyday occasions; indeed, Mistress Alice adopted no measures to mask her little despotisms, which it must be allowed sat upon her not unbecomingly.

When the two young folks rode forward and left her, Rachel turned and went on her homeward course musing and meditative. Of whom was it that Alice so strongly reminded her—was it of some real person or some picture that she had seen? The idea haunted and eluded her for several days, and then it came upon her like a flash that the bewildering likeness she saw was to the portrait of a lady which hung over the chimney-piece in the dining-hall at the old Woodlands Manor Farm between Claymire and Knowle.

To assure herself that this was no mere fanciful crotchet she set off the next morning to look at the portrait again; there it still was, framed in the panel,—a spot of sunlight where all else was gloom, antiquity and decay. By the dress, it dated two centuries back at the least; and the farmer's dame told Rachel that if her memory served her rightly it was the picture of a Lady Eleanor Seymour—a Roman Catholic lady, as she supposed from the cross on her bodice. She had heard that Woodlands belonged to the Seymors up to her father's time, when they had sold it to Earl Rashleigh, who had converted it into a farmstead.

There were several Seymour monuments in Claymire Church, and one of them, bearing the figures of a knight and a lady lying side by side in a recess of the chancel, with three children at their feet, was the monument of this very Lady Eleanor and her husband, Sir Reginald Seymour. They appeared from their sculptured effigies to have been quite in years when they died, but the portrait was that of a face in the dewy velvet bloom of May, with two eyes softly shining, blue and frank as heaven, two lips pouting like a rose-bud at the blush; a chin sweetly curved, a throat round and smooth as marble, flowing tresses of ashen-shadowed gold; a form slender yet stately—half maiden-simple, half proud princess, self-conscious, loving and lovely.

It was Alice, but with a difference. In Alice there was more warmth of coloring, more nature, more passion; but as Rachel stood gazing up at the portrait, it seemed to mock her with little traits that "peeped out here and there, from the arch of the lip, the nostril, the line of the level brow, so like and yet unlike the Sunshine of Brookfall!"

Rachel was not, as a rule, genealogically curious, but she now said to herself she would try to trace out this Lady Eleanor Seymour, and get to know if there existed any remote kinship between her family and the Gilslands. She therefore in this intent inquired about for a County History amongst her acquaintance, until one day Alice herself brought down to the cottage a very ancient and moth-eaten tome which Dr. Ferrand had borrowed for her from an antiquarian in Exeter. They sat down together and began to turn it over, looking at its engravings, drawn in the queerest perspective, and its family trees, some now dead altogether, some dwindled down to a single stem, until they came on that of which Rachel was in search. There they were—a chapter full of Seymors, knights and baronets, with their marriages and intermarriages, and their descendants, lineal and collateral, down to the middle of the eighteenth century. In the seventeenth occurred the Sir Reginald whose monument was in Claymire Church; and who married in the year sixteen hundred and fifty-three *Eleanor Gwynne*, youngest daughter of Rupert Gwynne, Esquire, of Alversham in the county of Surrey—"Gwynne," murmured Rachel to herself; "*Gwynne*," that was the name of poor Helena; and I do think that portrait has a look of *her* too."

She let the leaf lie, and fell into a reverie. She saw nothing yet; but unconsciously the first stone was laid in her mind for the slow building up of a discovery; but it was left unshaped—a bit of material in the rough though by no means waste. Alice had tired of the musty old volume before this, and sat sunning herself by the open window until Rachel came out of her reverie, and told her why she had wanted it. Alice had never seen the portrait that was like herself; but she would go and see it.

"It is strange, and you are not to laugh at me if I tell you, Rachel," said she a little confusedly; "but the first time you came to Miss Cornwell's—that night you were in the school-room and heard the subjects read—I recollect

telling Janey Grantham that I was sure I had known you somewhere else. They said it was impossible, and when I looked at you afterward I could not see it. Aunt Delia is always telling me my imagination runs away with my judgment, and perhaps it does; for I often fancy very odd things."

Rachel did not laugh at her young companion, but neither did she ask her what these "odd things" were; for she knew that Alice's benefactresses wished her to be reminded as little as possible of the early portions of her life; but though they avoided talking of that gloomy past, no one imagined that she had wholly forgotten it. Rachel had never yet heard her allude to Mr. Gilsland in any way, but wandering up over the downs with her one evening, she stopped by a certain stile, and pointing to a thatched shed which stood a little higher up, partially sheltered by the hedge, she said, "It was there that Sinclair found me, Rachel—have you ever seen the spot before? If I were to die for Sinclair, I don't think it would be enough!" Rachel smiled up in the bright face glowing with enthusiasm. "If I were to die for him it would be *nothing*!" she repeated, and walked on quickly with glancing eyes and a sob in her throat.

This sort of thing was not much in placid Rachel's way; she did not quite comprehend Alice's caprices of feeling, and thought perhaps silence was the best way of meeting them; she held her peace, therefore, until an opportunity occurred of setting off on the tack of wild-flower talk, which she sustained singly until Alice's spirit went down, and she was tame enough to join in it.

II.

"Why does Mr. More always suggest to me a cheese-colored tom-cat? He does, especially viewed from behind," said that dreadfully vivacious little Miss Crispe to Rachel Withers.

It was on the occasion of a tea-drinking in the rectory gardens with the first syllabub of the season, when Mr. More appeared in sedulous attendance on Miss Delia Ferrand and her Sunshine. He kept as close to the pair as their shadow, though perhaps nobody but the watchful wee spinster had observed it. Rachel smiled at her remark, and looked too, but was unable to see the feline resemblance she mentioned. She saw something more important, however.

"He must be courting one of them—which can it be?" said wicked Miss Crispe again; "just notice his ambling gait, and his purring countenance. He is pervaded with love from top to toe!" Rachel was rather amazed and rather shocked; but really Miss Crispe had reason in what she said. The little man looked altogether in glory.

Miss Delia and her Sunshine appeared equally unconscious of any thing conspicuous in his assiduities; they were accustomed to have him dangling after them, and he had quietly appropriated to himself many little privileges in consequence. He was a favorite at Brookfall, as well with Alice as with the aunts; and Alice, who had the frolic audacity of a child at times, when she was possessed by the spirit of fun and mischief, paid his formality small respect. But he was not aggrieved by her vagaries—quite

the reverse indeed; she might do any thing, and whatever she did was beautiful in his eyes. He talked of her to Rachel Withers that very afternoon, giving his sentiments full play.

"She has a sweet, pure, ardent nature that refreshes the feelings like a song," said he, in that mystical metaphorical jargon of lofty talking to which plain people like Rachel non-understandingly assent, trying to look sympathetic, but falling very far short in the matter of reply. He went on, "I have known her, Miss Withers, from the fortunate hour when a careful Providence guided her lost footsteps to the threshold of those dear ladies at Brookfall." (No acknowledgment of Sinclair Ferrand as the instrument of Providence.) "I have seen her grow in beauty, and in a better grace than beauty, year by year since until now, 'standing with reluctant feet where the brook and river meet, womanhood and childhood sweet,' I see her like a fair flower in the morn's dewy sunshine, expanding into a character of wondrous loveliness and perfection!"

But the phrases are nothing without the tone and gestures of the little man! Rachel wished Alice could have heard him; did he ever address her in that florid style, and if so, how did she answer him? Perhaps in her fairy fantasia manner. They had been friends from very early date, and he brought her little gifts and prettinesses still, as he used to bring her toys and playbooks when she was a child, and she accepted them with as frank a pleasure, appearing to regard the donor with an almost filial benevolence. He was a kind-hearted, benevolent little man in reality, but clogged outside with a frieze of affectations: affectations that had been worn so long and so systematically that at last they had become a second nature of confirmed habits. Miss Crispe insisted that he had begun originally to form himself on some romantic ideal in a novel, and that this was the queer result.

Since the first visit Rachel Withers had paid to Claymire with her godmamma the village had increased somewhat; a row of detached houses had been built fronting the sea, which were a favorite resort of invalids in search of seclusion and quiet. The Oliver Warleighs had found their way down from town to one of them, intending to remain throughout the summer; and as Rachel was not aware of their coming it was a great surprise to her to see them appear in the rectory gardens amongst the doctor's other guests.

Oliver Warleigh looked much the same as he did two years ago, and though Lady Georgiana assured Rachel he was much stronger than then, he had one of his nervous fainting attacks while walking on the terrace in front of the rectory and had to be led into the doctor's study to recover. Lady Georgiana had grown inured to his condition, for she did not betray any alarm, and simply begged every body to stand back from him. Alice in her kind eagerness to be of use ran for a glass of wine, but when she approached with it, Lady Georgiana impatiently pushed her aside, spilling the sherry down the child's pretty new muslin dress. Alice stared with astonishment, and for a moment, Rachel who was by, feared from her change of color that pettishness was going to get the better of

politeness; but she needed no second hint to get out of the way; she disappeared and never came back again; and when Rachel sought and found her, she was walking under the rookery elms behind the house, all trembling and in a state of the greatest excitement.

"Who is that lady with the pale face pitted with the small-pox?" she asked hastily. "I have seen her before—those cruel eyes of hers make me shudder."

Rachel told her Lady Georgiana was a stranger at Claymire, and she must be mistaken about having seen her before; then she explained the connection between her own family and the Warleighs, but Alice was not satisfied, though she refused to go back into the garden to verify or to disperse her impression. No, she affirmed, she knew those cold, leaden gray eyes too well to wish to come under their ken again, and she should stay where she was.

"I know her, I tell you," she reiterated passionately when Rachel smiled over her persistence, and then added in a lower tone, "and she knows me too." Rachel judged it expedient to let the subject drop; she had heard Miss Delia say that it was worse than breath wasted to attempt to reason away any crotchet that had once gained possession of Alice's mind. The best and briefest plan was to let it alone to die out of itself.

The day after this incident at the rectory, Alice came down betimes to Rachel to persuade her out upon the rocks where she wished to go in search of anemones and other quaint marine creatures to furnish forth a very handsome glass which the doctor had presented to her. The aunts never descended below the cliffs, and Sinclair being engaged, she was of course far too impatient to await his leisure.

"If you are too busy to come I will ask Miss Crispe," said she, looking in through the open window at Rachel placidly enjoying her newspaper and her breakfast. "I know she would like to go, only I am afraid that she might fall into one of the deep pools and be taken overhead; she is such a wee old woman!" Rachel consented to accompany her if she could wait ten minutes, which she did, perching on the window-sill, and singing to herself like the blithe bird she was.

It was delightful on the shore in the morning, but Rachel did not often summon courage to turn out so early as this. Alice directed her steps straight to the low rocks where the tide was down, talking fluently from Mr. Gosse's book, and doing her best to indoctrinate her companion with the interesting subject that pervaded her own thoughts. Then they set diligently to work, but it is not certain that their search would have been successful had not Mortimer Warleigh come wandering that way, and stopped to watch what they were doing. Rachel did not at once recognize him; for he had grown manly in appearance since they last met, but he soon challenged her, and asked if he might be permitted to join in the hunt. She thankfully acquiesced; for not being possessed by the same enthusiasm for every thing new that inspires young folks like Alice, she did not find it either a very easy or a very agreeable business; she was indeed getting very wet and uncomfortable about the feet, and even when she

did see a fantastical thing like a flower sticking on a rock which Sunshine ecstatically pronounced lovely, she had a shrinking disinclination to touch it; so that the help she rendered was very trifling. But Mortimer Warleigh understood how to capture the creatures so that they hardly knew it; he clipped them off with a bit of their native stone under them, and found many comicalities—one like a scarlet jockey's cap that was only an anemone reversed, with which Alice was charmed to enrich her collection.

It never occurred to Rachel that she was either doing or permitting any thing but what was strictly regular and discreet. The two young people made acquaintance readily enough; for Alice had a pleasant, frank, cheerful manner with her, and Mortimer Warleigh seemed bent on being equally useful and agreeable. He told Rachel that his father and mother were somewhere on the beach, and when she saw them in the distance, she made an excuse to leave the slippery rocks that she might go and speak to them. Alice then went farther away, saying she had not yet gathered half spoils enough, and Mortimer followed her; Rachel had not forgotten her remarks of yesterday upon Lady Georgiana, and aware that she would evade a second meeting if possible, promised by and by to come back to the rocks; Alice said very well, and bade her not hurry herself, as she meant to stay an hour or two longer.

Oliver Warleigh looked more himself that morning; more composed and self-possessed than usual, and he shook hands with Rachel as if to see her pleased him. "I find this air agree with me, it agrees with me," murmured he in the weak uncertain voice which seemed now to have become habitual with him. "It was my wife's suggestion that we should come here. The scenery is very rich and luxuriant; there is nothing like England for greenness; I always tell my friends so; there is no verdure out of England, no turf," and so on he maundered, long after Lady Georgiana in her distinct harsh tones had begun to give Rachel an outline of their present arrangements and the reasons for them. How is it that people who are plotting underhand work are generally so ready to explain their visible doings about which no one is in doubt?

"Clara is at school in Paris, and Roderick is at Bonn; only Mortimer is here with us, and he finds it dull, poor boy," said she. "But he is such an exceeding comfort to his father and myself that we can not bear him away from us. He has a fine disposition, has Mortimer—a beautiful generous disposition." She looked toward him as she spoke with as much tenderness as her stony face was capable of expressing; and then after a moment's pause asked who could be the young lady upon whom he seemed to be dancing attendance. Rachel told her it was Alice Gilsland, the child whom the Misses Ferrand had adopted, and reminded her of the ill-dressed girl whom she had seen and commented upon at the Exhibition two years since. She remembered the trivial incident perfectly.

"She was a rather ungainly, awkward creature then, was she not?" said she, pursuing Sunshine's light figure with a critical eye. "I should not have known her again. She brought some

wine for Oliver yesterday when he was taken ill at the rectory, but I did not recognize her." (Lady Georgiana had recognized her on the instant.) "Now that I observe her I do; but still there is something peculiar about her attire which would make her very remarkable had she not natural grace enough to counteract the absurd effect of her straight petticoats and little jacket. It is a mistake in your pious people to rely so much on the outward advertisement of their clothing to prove them out of this wicked world; for, after all, nobody of sense believes in a sanctified poke bonnet or a limp draggown."

Lady Georgiana did not often indulge herself in sarcastic speeches, and perhaps this slipped out unawares; for she made haste to add that the ladies at Brookfall were most excellent, worthy people—indeed, their treatment of Alice proved them to be of the salt of the earth, and she trusted they would do her the honor of calling upon her. She then asked several questions about Sinclair Ferrand, saying that she saw no young men about except the doctor's son. "And Mortimer would be the better for a companion, therefore I hope they will make acquaintance," continued she. "He was out boating when he ought to have been at the rectory with us, or they would have met there. He will not like to be thrown quite on his own resources for amusement while we are down here."

Oliver Warleigh had fallen into a drowse during the last few minutes, but now waking up suddenly, he wanted to go home; Lady Georgiana succeeded in pacifying his impatience a little longer while she held Rachel in conversation, but perceiving presently that he grew restless and excited at the delay, she recalled the donkey chaise boy, who had been sent to employ himself out of ear-shot, and they took their slow way up the zigzag in the cliffs to their lodgings.

Rachel remained where she was, seated on a boulder within the shadow of the rocks; for there were yet no signs of Alice being ready to abandon her entrancing occupation; and while dreamily listening with eyes shut and senses only half awake to the soft sigh of the waves on the shore, she was startled by Sinclair Ferrand's voice asking close by,

"Miss Withers, who is that with Alice on the reef?"

She jumped up, made abruptly aware of some neglect, and hastened to explain Mortimer Warleigh's intimacy with herself, while Sinclair stood shading his eyes under his broad hand and looking out at the two figures, which moved to and fro together, or bent down, or compared notes on their discoveries, or gazed idly seawards into the great calm and sultry hush of the noonday.

"I'll go to them," said the young man, and started off with rapid strides, never heeding when Rachel called after him that as he was there to take care of Alice and convoy her home, she should go away; for she had already been three hours on the beach, and was very tired. She waited to see him join Alice, and to witness the pantomime of introduction between the young men, and then strolled leisurely up the cliffs by herself; not sorry to effect her escape, and not in the least disquieted as to the acquaintance between Alice and Mortimer that had been begun under her auspices.

The little incidents of the morning were past

and almost forgotten, she had dined and was cosing with a delightful new novel in her sofa corner, when she saw the ladies from Brookfall toddling round by the most circuitous path to her door, making their remarks on her carelessly ordered borders as they advanced. From their gray dresses, white shawls, and huge leg-horn bonnets in which they were habited, she perceived that they had been engaging in the arduous duty of a first call of ceremony; which call, she immediately conjectured, had been made on Lady Georgiana Warleigh, and she was right. There was a degree of stiffness in the manner of both the sisters as they entered which impressed her at once with the fact that she had, however innocently, offended them; and when they were satisfactorily seated, she waited to hear *how* before introducing any indifferent topic of conversation.

Miss Delia was not the person to beat long about the bush when her mind was made up to speak, and fixing on Rachel two eyes of mild reproach, she said:

"Oh, Rachel, we are so grieved that you should have made that gay young Mr. Warleigh and our dear girl known to each other. Flora and I had decided not to call on his mamma, lest such an unsuitable intimacy should arise, and now our anxious precautions are all undone by your want of discretion. We have felt obliged to pay to Lady Georgiana the compliment we did not intend to pay; and as we feared beforehand, she is not a person whose intimacy we can desire to cultivate. She used formerly to be quite given up to the world, and at heart she is so still."

"I would not quite assert that, dear sister," interposed Miss Flora more tenderly; "if she has not to bear what weans a woman from vanity, who can be called afflicted?"

"That is not the question," said Miss Delia in her peremptory tone. "Rachel ought to have been wiser than to lead Alice into the society of that very fascinating young man. I am not aware that she is either more susceptible or more silly than other girls, but *she* is vacant and *he* is idle, and foolish love springs up fast in idleness. She was too tired to accompany us on the call we have just been making and I was glad of it."

Rachel was so much taken aback by the sudden view of the responsibilities she had incurred, that she never thought of defending herself; but only said she believed Mortimer Warleigh to be not merely harmless but positively good, adding as a mental reservation that Miss Delia jumped very quickly to absurd conclusions when her fancy was once set on the alert.

"Good, Rachel—well, he *may* be good; far be it from me to say that he is not," returned the old lady in a tone that implied a thousand doubts. "He has the most beautiful face for a man I ever saw, but he fell asleep at church last Sunday morning, and he never came to the evening service at all."

Rachel did not feel this quite so conclusive as Miss Delia—in fact, she had seen *her* nod at sermon too, and nobody could have dreamed of denying that she was a woman of almost venerable goodness.

"You see, dear Rachel, Alice is a solemn care on our minds," said Miss Flora, who, of the two sisters, had by far the larger share of practical

wisdom. "If she were our own child the anxiety might be less, but the love could not be greater. We not only try to promote her happiness but we also strive to keep her out of the way of unhappiness. One need not be a witch to see that she will take her life very much in earnest, there is so much passion in her nature; and though it is the fashion nowadays to talk of love as if it were a mere breath on a mirror, I should think it is pretty much what it always was."

"Dear Flora, pause! You are growing sentimental, and what is the use of *that*?" broke in Miss Delia tartly. "Rachel knows as well as we do, that there is no greater misfortune for a girl than that she should set her affections on an unworthy object. I can not tell you by what magic it was that the moment I saw that young man with his beautiful countenance and joyous air I said to myself, 'We must keep our dear girl out of *your* way!' and now, here is Rachel, with her inconceivable carelessness, quietly circumventing us!"

Rachel ought to have felt profoundly penitent, seeing the old ladies' genuine distress, but she did not; she could scarcely forbear a smile, and some mischievous spirit prompted her to suggest that perhaps there was a *fate* in it.

"Fate, nonsense! who talks of fate?" ejaculated Miss Delia pettishly. "Every body who has the care of young folks must indulge some hopes and expectations in their behalf, and ours for Alice have ever been that a worthy staid man, with plenty of ballast and a round dozen of years older than herself, might win her affections and marry her. That would be *her* most desirable *fate*."

To this Rachel answered not a word, but her face became expressive of keenest amazement and dismay when she caught this glimpse of Sunshine's foreshadowed future; and Miss Delia, who read her sentiments distinctly, wagged her head and exclaimed, "You may look astonished, Rachel, at our prosaic notions, for you are ingrained with romance; but let me assure you that some of the happiest marriages we know were no better than compromises with what you are pleased to call *fate*, and some of the miserablest failures began in the realization of youth's fantastical desires."

Rachel drew a long breath and attempted no reply beyond a remark that her observation had not led her to the same conclusion as Miss Delia, but to one precisely the reverse of it.

III.

Lady Georgiana Warleigh was not proud of her son Mortimer altogether without reason; neither were the ladies of Brookfall without grounds for their fears. He was clever, but not in the common way, and superlatively handsome, though not in the muscular Christianity manner; never, indeed, was there a stronger contrast between two young men than between him and Sinclair Ferrand. He drew in water-colors charmingly; he played and sang, no amateur better; he quoted recondite wisdom and popular poetry with the same graceful facility; and when he lent himself to conversation, it was with such an earnest, sincere pleasantness that every body was immediately impressed in his favor by the personal interest that he appeared

to feel in them. He was thoroughly amiable, and like many persons of that temper, thoroughly indolent. But even his indolence was attractive. Busy people looked at him and allowed that labor, painstaking and trouble could not be sent into the world to harass such as him; Utopia should be his abode, or if not Utopia, then the brave good fortune laid out for him as Sir Laurence Warleigh's heir. He seemed quite suited to his destiny, and if, with that advantage and so many others to boot, he found himself much flattered and made of in the world, of course, neither he nor any one had a right to be astonished. He was never astonished, but took maternal incense and all other as naturally as the flowers take dew.

One afternoon he spoke to Rachel Withers of his uncle Laurence, saying he was in Greece. "And I ought to have been with him," added he; "but he makes such a toil of his pleasures that I can not follow his fortunes. At Midsummer I like to dwell in some sleepy hollow like this where there is no suggestion of the duty of getting up to work. My spirit sings with the lotus-eaters, 'There is no joy but calm!'" And he appeared as if he felt it in every fibre of his languid frame. He had gone down to Rachel with a message from his mother, and finding her in the garden, tying up her carnations, had cast himself on the lawn and there lay, basking in the sunshine, the very type of luxurious laziness, when Sinclair Ferrand and Alice, riding by, stopt at the gate.

If there was one place more than another in which Alice looked beautiful it was on horseback, and never in her life, perhaps, had she looked lovelier than she did now. The aunts had committed the amazing mistake of warning her against Mortimer Warleigh, and a soft, self-conscious expression blushed all over her face as she answered his greeting with a shy pride that had never been observable in her before.

Sinclair was rather crisp in his manner; he just nodded to Mortimer, and then cried out, "Miss Withers, you are wanted at Brookfall—can you go up to tea this afternoon? Aunt Delia has difficulties on her mind about the school treat, and you and Miss Crispe are required to consult." Rachel asked if the morrow would do as well; for she had just promised her company to Lady Georgiana Warleigh, and was to return with Mortimer; his father had had a very bad day, and she was prevented in consequence from leaving the house.

"It will do quite as well," said Alice; "but come early, for there are twenty things to settle besides that, because of our soon going abroad. Good-by!" And so the two rode on—silent until they were out of sight of Mortimer Warleigh watching them down the lane.

He stood there long after they were gone, and Rachel proceeded with her work amongst her flowers, snipping here, binding there, weeding elsewhere, until he either grew weary of waiting or of his own thoughts; for he said,

"Miss Withers, I respect your perseverance, but it fatigues me to watch you. When are you coming with me to my mother?"

She replied that she would go at once; that is, as soon as she had made a little necessary change in her dress, and then she left him, chanting dreamily to himself—

"Death is the end of life; ah, why
Should life all labor be?
Let us alone. Time driveth onward fast,
And in a little while our lips are dumb.
Let us alone. What is it that will last?"

A melancholy tone this for one so young, Rachel thought; but for all his beauty and his joyous air he did somehow impress her with an indefinable mournfulness. When she returned to the garden he was gone—vanished utterly—so she left a message with Hanson in case he should come back and set off alone to the house on the cliff where the Oliver Warleighs were lodging. Lady Georgiana was glad to see her—she would have been glad to see any body, for Claymire was stagnation itself to her; but where, she asked, was Mortimer? Rachel told her how he had disappeared, on which she exclaimed,

"Ah, I thought he had something new running in his mind—it is that beautiful nymph at Brookfall!" Here was confirmation of Miss Delia's fears!

"Well!" cried Rachel recklessly, without thinking to whom she spoke, "if he has, it can not be helped—it is the way of all flesh!"

Lady Georgiana looked at her with visible, smiling surprise, but she dropped the subject, and then they fell to talking of things in general, until Oliver who had been taking his siesta in the room adjoining gave the signal that he was awake by knocking on the floor with his stick. Mortimer soon after presented himself, and they all went to tea, after which they sat out under the verandah, and talked at intervals, and watched the sea. How feelings change! Instead of her ancient antipathy Rachel felt only a sort of pitiful friendliness toward Oliver Warleigh and Lady Georgiana now; and a remorse for the wrong she had done in her secret thoughts to two people who had suffered so long and so severely.

Mortimer was very gentle to his father; indeed it was not in him to be less than kind to any living thing; his fault lay rather in too sensitive and feminine a tenderness.

"He should have been my daughter," whispered Lady Georgiana to Rachel aside; "my daughter instead of Clara; for poor Clara, though a good girl, is unfortunately plain."

Rachel could only remember her as the naughty baby who had refused to kiss her, and who was so mysteriously managed by her mother into being submissive.

When she left, Mortimer walked home with her, and though he was in a gay mood all the way until they reached the gate, it was perhaps rather significant that his last words should be, "She is going abroad, your young friend—is she going for long?" Rachel said it was uncertain; she had not heard it much talked of yet, then good night, and he departed.

IV.

The dear old anxious ladies at Brookfall made Mortimer Warleigh's personal acquaintance the next day in a manner much more ludicrous than agreeable. Rachel Withers had gone up in the afternoon according to her promise, expecting to see Miss Crispe only; but on her arrival she found the feminine conclave sitting at business in great formality with Mr. More presiding—there was nothing, however private and domestic, in the parish that that little man did not

contrive to have his hands in it! This was a debate on the school feast—where and how it was to be held; and on what day. Miss Crispe was present, trim, tiny and mischievous as usual, too evidently conspiring with Alice to coax a little fun out of the tedious proceedings which lasted until tea brought them to a welcome end.

In token of its being rather a festive occasion, and also because it was very warm out of doors and Alice wished it, the table had been spread under the beautiful brown beech-tree above the waterfall, and there they were, lazily luxuriating on strawberries and cream and other delectable things, intermingled with social chat, when they heard a rustle and a rush, a scramble and a crackling of broken branches, and almost before they had time to look up to the steep, rocky bank whence proceeded the mysterious commotion, down into the midst of them rolled Mortimer Warleigh,—his coat torn and grasping in his hand an ineffectual branch which had snapped from some tree when he caught at it to arrest his descent.

Miss Flora sprang up much alarmed calling vaguely for assistance, but Miss Delia who recognized the intruder in spite of dilapidations exclaimed, "Young gentleman, I beg to say that these grounds are private, but if you are injured it is no matter," she did not mean the injury was no matter, but the privacy of the grounds.

Mortimer rose looking painfully confused, and lifted his hand to his head from which his hat was missing.

"I am not hurt," said he, and then his eyes fell on Alice who stood a pace or two off; those sensitive lips of hers all a-quiver, but whether with laughter or sympathy was not very apparent.

"Oh, you must be hurt after that crash—don't tell me you are not!" cried Miss Delia again, and the poor young man now pleaded guilty by turning very white and threatening to faint.

"Water!" whispered Alice, and offered a glass to his lips, of which, however, he was no longer in a condition to avail himself, for the next moment he became unconscious.

"Here is a pretty dilemma!" muttered little Miss Crispe. "It is my belief he did it on purpose;" and just then appeared in sight Dr. Ferrand and his son, crossing the lawn to join the agitated party.

All this while Mr. More had remained seated, stately and sulky behind the urn, regarding the unlucky Mortimer as a personal affront to himself and awkwardly thinking his thoughts aloud as his custom was when greatly perturbed.

"Hum," grumbled he in the inner voice which served him on these occasions, "Hum; this is worse than that red-haired young fellow. Ribs or collar-bone broken, of course, or shoulder dislocated, and he will be laid up here for a month—then they will be for adopting him too. Very dangerous, hum!" But things were not quite so bad as that; there were no fractures discoverable, and after lying in the air and being ministered to as tenderly as a lady, the young man presently opened his fine eyes on the sun-burnt visage of Sinclair Ferrand, and asked where he was.

"You are all right," was Sinclair's answer.

"Here is my father who is more than half a surgeon, and he says you will do directly."

"It is a great mercy it was no worse; it gave us a dreadful fright in the midst of tea," remarked Miss Delia.

"He could not help it," whispered her sister considerably; and then the uninvited guest, being propped against the bank in the shade, was by and by persuaded to eat some strawberries which Alice prepared for him with her own pinky fingers, and mingled with sugar and cream just as she would have liked them herself; but he could not plume himself on the graceful attention, for she afterward did the same thing for the doctor and even for Sinclair.

The party now contained too many discordant elements to amalgamate as it had done before. Mr. More was precisely the man to be one amongst a circle of ladies; there he shone much more brilliantly than amongst his own sex or in even a mixed assemblage. He had a little politeness at every woman's service and was as civil to those who were plain and elderly as to those who were young and handsome; but with the doctor, Sinclair, and the splendid young stranger to dispense their conversation amongst them as well as himself, he appeared under the same disadvantage as the sun does during a total eclipse.

If Miss Delia Ferrand was severe on conspicuous beauty and good luck, misfortune was a key that opened her kind heart at once; several times were her eyes caught resting compassionately on the pathetic figure of poor Mortimer, reclining against the green bank; his rich chestnut hair hanging over his forehead, and a touching pallor still on his face.

"I never saw any thing so lovely; he looks like a bit of porcelain," whispered Miss Crispe. Mr. More overheard her and sneered; "And he seems almost as brittle."

It was not often that Mr. More was ill-natured, but at this moment his globular eyes behind his spectacles were feline in their spiteful glitter. It was a comical scene altogether; Sinclair Ferrand leisurely consumed his strawberries, appearing to notice nothing, but in reality taking in every thing. He had a very fine countenance, that young man, though undiscerning persons called him ugly.

Alice sat beside the doctor who, when he had seen that nothing was seriously amiss with the stranger, had settled himself to his tea in a business-like way, wholly undisturbed and uninterested by the little drama that was being enacted around him; he was going up to the cottagers in the Glenwood afterward, and did not loiter over it, but rose as soon as he had finished, and patting his favorite on the crown, said,—

"Get your hat, Sunshine, and come with me," which she did immediately and with an air of satisfaction. "I will leave you here, Sinclair, to give an arm to Mr. Mortimer Warleigh down the hill," added he, and Sinclair, nodding assent, went on eating strawberries.

Mortimer put in a word of disclaimer as to his needing assistance, but no one listened, and as soon as the doctor and his pretty companion had disappeared through the shrubbery wicket, he lifted himself up from the ground with a rather ungraceful stiffness, and proposed to go.

"I trust you do not feel very much the worse

for your terrible fall, but *do* let us send you home in the brougham," cried Miss Delia, taking his limp white hand, for she was now quite melted and sympathetic.

"Oh, yes, it shall be ordered at once! Why did we not think of it before?" added Miss Flora also with tender feeling.

But Mortimer declined the carriage—he would not alarm his mother for the world, ("so kindly thoughtful of him," murmured Miss Delia, verging on affectionate admiration,) and he also declined the offer of Sinclair's stalwart arm.

"But pray allow some one to go with you, or the brougham would be ready in five minutes," urged Miss Flora.

"I thank you, but it is quite unnecessary," replied Mortimer with a wan smile.

Sinclair did not press the services that had been once rejected, but with calm indifference went on clearing each dish of fruit, while Mr. More sat primly measuring his thumbs, staring through his spectacles, and muttering, "What nonsense it was to make such a fuss over that young puppy!"

Miss Delia, however, put on a sad countenance and persisted in her expressions of sympathy.

"I trust you may reach home without any return of faintness, but I do not feel it at all safe to let you go alone," said she, then, catching a sight of Rachel Withers, a bright idea struck her, and she exclaimed, "Oh, here is Rachel Withers! she must pass along the cliff to reach home; I am sure she will not mind leaving us a little earlier than usual, and she will be nice company for you."

Of course Rachel did not mind leaving a little earlier, and as Mortimer did not object to her, they set off together. No doubt but either Mr. More or Sinclair informed Alice when she returned how the luckless young gentleman had been sent home under feminine escort.

When they had gone a short way, Rachel asked her companion how he came to be wandering in the plantation above Brookfall, and he confessed plainly that it was in the hope of getting a glimpse of Alice. He walked very slowly, and she fancied with pain, but this he denied, saying it was only a little stiffness that would wear off by the morrow.

Poor Mortimer! that this accident should have happened to him, so sensitive as he was to ridicule! There was a quaint vanity about him too, and he spoke now and then as if he had proved more by his own experience than it was possible at his years he could have done; for he was not yet twenty. But like other thoughtful young folks, he took wisdom at second hand, and culled it where he could with a flavor of bitterness and sarcasm. What they evolve out of actual suffering is commonly much more mellow. Rachel could hardly forbear a smile when this beautiful youth with such a brilliant lot before him wound up a dissertation on the joys and cares of humanity with a passage from Burton which was surely never meant to be quoted *à propos* of a roll down a bank. "For a pint of honey thou shalt find a gallon of gall, for a dram of pleasure a pound of pain, for an inch of mirth an ell of moan, as ivy doth an oak these miseries encompass our life."

v.

On the following morning quite early, Miss

Delia Ferrand was down at the Oliver Warleighs' lodgings, calling on Lady Georgiana and inquiring how Mortimer was after his awkward accident; her compunctious visitings would not let her rest until she had done this duty of neighborly kindness, she told Rachel Withers to whose cottage she proceeded when her business elsewhere was accomplished.

"I do not like Lady Georgiana—no, there is something *covert* about her;" then said she, making an unconscious grimace as if she had something disagreeable in her mouth; "but Mortimer is an amiable character, though with no more sense of serious things than a Hot-tentot."

Rachel asked after Miss Flora and Alice.

"Oh, Flora is very well, but Alice is in one of her *moods*; she always is when there comes a letter from Mr. Gilsland," was the grievous reply. "And this morning there arrived something more than a letter: both Flora and I say that as he judged fit to keep the bits of trumpery back so long he had better never have sent them. The parcel was addressed to Alice also—which the letters never are—so that we had no opportunity of exercising our discretion about giving its contents to her. These were a miniature of her mother, some hair and a few trinkets—a brooch, a locket and two rings that she wore. Of course the child would have been adamant had she not felt upset, though she can have no recollection of her. Sinclair is off to a cricket match at Welsbeck, and there is no one to stir her up—if you are not busy, Rachel, will you come back and spend the day with us?"

Rachel consented without demur, and in a few minutes they were on their way. They walked up through the wood to escape the sultry glare on the cliffs, and on coming out by the waterfall there they found Alice sitting under the trees, her hat lying by her on the grass, her book flung aside and her hands clasping her knees in an attitude of weary abandonment. She was in no soft mood just then, but in a mood of hard revolt; her face set, pale and lowering, her eyes clouded but tearless. Rachel expected to find her full of sentimental sorrow, giving way to tender imaginations of her lost mother; weeping, pitiful, in need of gentlest comfort. She rose when they appeared and came forward to receive Rachel, saying when Miss Delia told her that she had come to spend the day that she was glad of it, and then offering to take the visitor to her room to put off her bonnet.

"Yes, do, my darling; luncheon must be on the table;" responded Miss Delia caressingly; and in her usual affectionate fashion, Alice slipped her hand under Rachel's arm, and led her away to the house and up-stairs.

The mementoes, said to be of her mother, which had come from Mr. Gilsland that morning, lay strewn on the toilet-table; the cotton wool, paper and string with which they had been packed amongst them; all in disorder, no arrangement or loving care—just as they had been taken up and cast down with as little interest as if they were new bought toys of lackerware from the bazaar in the village.

Rachel glanced at them but said not a word. The miniature was a poor washy thing on ivory, looking faded and quaint in its out-of-date dress—the dress, however, and a queer reflection it

was too, being of the identical fashion in which Rachel remembered herself best when she was young. The face had not a line of resemblance to Alice. It was feeble in feature and querulous in expression; in what expression it had that is. But it had been the work of an inferior artist who had stamped all his own faults and weaknesses upon his work. The trinkets were no more valuable than the miniature—an enameled locket, a brooch set with garnets, a ring of the same stones, two pins linked together by a slender chain, and a few things of even smaller account. In the locket was some hair of a light color, and lying apart by itself was a long brown tress, as soft and glossy as if it had only been severed yesterday.

Alice sat down on a chair at the corner of the table to wait for Rachel until she was ready, and her fingers began wandering from one of the relics to another, but with no fond, lingering tenderness of touch. Rachel did not like to see her action—there was something in it of repulsion and contempt. Once she took up the miniature, held it a moment in the palm of her hand, then with a sigh turned it face downward on the table. When they quitted the room, she left all lying as it was, open to any inquisitive servant's eye, if such there were at Brookfall.

The aunts took a swift, silent survey of their *protégée's* countenance when she joined them with Rachel at the luncheon table, but no reference was made to the event of the day. They talked about the arrangements for the foreign tour which was to be undertaken by the two old ladies and Alice in August, under the care of the doctor and his son; about the chance of sunshine on the morrow, when the rector was to give his annual hay-making feast to the young and old, rich and poor of his flock; about any thing and every thing, indeed, but what was uppermost in all their thoughts. Alice took no part in the conversation; she had not spoken to Rachel up-stairs and she did not speak now; in fact, the chief characteristic of her *mood* was that she was *dumb*—dumb as the provoking young lady of Parma in the Book of Nonsense.

Luncheon over, however, they all returned to the pretty, picturesque drawing-room, and then Alice whispered an invitation to Rachel to come out with her on the downs. Rachel consented gladly, and they set off, warned by Miss Delia that dinner was at five, to make a long evening afterward for a stroll in the glen-wood. Alice seemed no more talkatively disposed now than she was before; but Rachel let her alone, and they climbed the steep swelling breast of Ash-down without exchanging a syllable. Once on the high level, a delicious breeze from the sea met them in face, and onward they went for a good mile to a little hollow in the shoulder of the hill, whence there was a magnificent prospect of land and water.

"Here let us stay," said Alice. "To look over this scene always quietens me when nothing else will." And so she seated herself on the short herbage, leant her back against a higher ledge, and intimated that Rachel was to place herself beside her. This she did, and there for ever so long they remained, coolly shadowed from the afternoon heat by the ragged thorns that grew in the hollow, and fanned by the soft

south breeze blowing over new-mown fields of grass, broad patches of beans in blossom, and sweet honeysuckle hedges in the valley.

By and by Alice began to overflow.

"Rachel, what sort of a country do you love best? When I am in a district of hills I always want to be at the topmost point, to look abroad for the home where I lived with papa. In ascending any new height, my heart beats, oh! so heavily! I think I shall see it near below—I am sure I should know it if I ever did. Last summer we were in Wales, and we never went out amongst the mountains but I expected at some turn of them to come upon it. They say I can not remember, that I have dreamt *it*, that it is a delusion; but it is real, I *know* it is real! I mount up here to think about it, and keep it in my mind a clear image."

Rachel asked if this view they had before them was any thing like it. She said, No, it was not so soft; it was more like the dark Scotch glens that Sinclair had brought back in his sketch-book from the Highlands; and then she tried to paint it in words, but though the picture in her imagination might be distinct enough, she did not succeed in transferring it to her listener.

"Sometimes I am afraid to say what I feel," she went on after a prolonged silence. "I am afraid of being laughed at or of grieving *them*. Have you ever heard or read of such a thing as the whole of a life being foreseen in a vision? I think I must so have foreseen mine, for nothing that happens strikes me as a surprise. When Mr. Mortimer Warleigh came to us on the rocks that morning, and talked to me, *he* was not strange. I felt only as if I had been warned that some day he would appear, and there he was."

Rachel smiled now, and put her own interpretation on this mysterious intimation and its fulfillment; and Alice, detecting her amusement, exclaimed, in a tone of annoyance, "You are going to mock at me like every body else."

No, she was not, Rachel earnestly assured her; she was very far indeed from mocking at what seemed so serious to her. But Alice kept silence for the next five minutes, watching through half-closed eyes the bees drowsily humming in the wild thyme, and toying in her heart with some thought that was not altogether sad.

Presently she spoke again.

"If they could tell me where that happy home of mine with papa was, I should be so much more contented, but nobody can. They say he was not a good man; that he went wandering hither and thither, never staying in any place long; and that they all lost sight of him for many years. That is *his* story; you know whom I mean. *But I do not believe it.* It came in the letter to-day; for I had asked to know all there was to be known about my father; and he tells me *that*, and sends those things which he says were my mother's—well, they *may* be, but *I do not believe that either.*"

Rachel was very much dismayed; she could not answer her at all. Alice enunciated these extraordinary sentiments with a perfect calmness and assurance; but apparently she did not expect her companion to reply; for she continued after a moment's pause, "I dare not say

this to aunt Delia or aunt Flora; it would distress them so bitterly; but I must say it to some one—let me talk to *you*." Rachel had no wish to check her and she did talk; she talked out of the dreamy imaginations of her heart such a chapter of fancies as her sober-minded hearer would never have expected to find anywhere save in the pages of a romance. She seemed to suppose herself some sort of lost princess; but "alas!" thought Rachel, "these are not the days of fairy-tale transformations, and there is no probability of your ever turning out to be other than a poor little Cinderella rescued by the ladies at Brookfall from quite commonplace neglect and destitution!" She did not tell her so, however,—why should she not dream her dream?

They went home again only just in time for dinner, and Rachel had the satisfaction of carrying Alice back with her in a much more pleasant and cheerful temper than that in which she set out. Some one had been busy in their absence, and had cleared away the relics, and left all neat and in order. The trinkets had disappeared out of sight, but the miniature was hanging over the mantelpiece, on a nail that had been newly driven into the wall for it, just below a fine engraving of the Madonna della Sedia which had been a Christmas gift from the doctor to his favorite Sunshine. Alice caught sight of it the moment she entered the room, and uttering a vexed exclamation, went straight to the hearth, and was on the point of raising her hand to remove it when Rachel said deprecatingly,

"Let it be, Alice, let it be!" but she turned on her with passion-darkened eyes and demanded, "Why should it hang there to fret me every day of my life? I will not let it be—I shall hide it out of my sight."

Rachel did not attempt to gainsay her any further, and she actually took the miniature down, wrenched the nail from the wall with her tender fingers, then opened a drawer into which she was accustomed to throw odds and ends of ribbons and other useless things, and laid it upon its face in the midst of that trashy confusion. Rachel's soft heart was shocked at what seemed so like utter want of feeling; though exaggerated sensibility disgusted her, she liked to see natural tenderness have its way. But Alice had a plea—she evidently did not believe the poor little faded picture to be her mother's portrait, and as such she would neither accept nor honor it.

By the time dinner was over and dessert on the table, she was almost herself again; not so ready to chatter, perhaps, but quite ready to take her share in the general talk. The aunts were gratified and caressing with her, plying her with kind words and the fairest fruits like some capricious pet bird that they could not indulge or fondle enough. When the old ladies retired to the drawing-room afterward to enjoy their usual forty winks, she betook herself to the garden to look out for Sinclair and the doctor, who generally wandered up from the rectory at this hour of the summer evenings, between dinner and tea, for a gossip or a leisurely stroll in the glenwood. They came by and by, and then Rachel, who had had enough of walking, took her leave and went home, while Alice and the

rest sauntered into the wood; Sinclair listening to Sunshine's version of the morning's distress, and the doctor listening to his sister's, with much the same feeling toward Mr. Gilsland as Miss Delia had expressed to Rachel in the morning. Since he had seen fit to keep the poor relics back until now, he would have done both more wisely and more kindly had he kept them back altogether.

As the reader possibly suspects, it was a device suggested to Mr. Gilsland by Lady Georgiana Warleigh in the intention of affirming all previous particulars that had been given to Alice and her benefactresses concerning her parentage. It failed of its object with Alice utterly, but the unsuspicious aunts received it in implicit good faith.

VI.

There can not be a much prettier, pleasanter scene in the world than a large gathering of children making holiday; and such a scene was that in the glebe meadow where the doctor's hay was down, and the sun was shining resplendently. The little ones mustered in great force about three o'clock, marshaled by the infant class mistress, and by Alice who was a clever manager amongst the very tinies; and about half an hour later the main body of the school marched in under the master. First a hymn was sung and then the grand rout of tea and cake began. Most of the children saved their dinner on these famous occasions, and came to the feast voracious as young lions; it was great fun to see how enjoyingly they ate; their eyes enlarging and their cheeks swelling visibly during the process.

About midway the entertainment the grandees began to arrive, and quiet as was Claynir at ordinary times, the assemblage in the doctor's garden overlooking the meadow at these celebrations was gay enough and fashionable enough to be an immense attraction to the rustic gaze. Amongst other strangers appeared two Miss Clutterbucks, newly come from town, who wore such amplitude of petticoat that in passing between the ranks of infants to distribute cake, they literally swept the wee-est over; fortunately they were seated on the hay, and so they fell soft; had they been perched on benches, the result must have been disastrous.

"Did you ever see any thing more out of character at a hay-making school feast?" cried Miss Clarke, the curate's sister, who sinned as little in expanse of skirt as did the ladies at Brookfall, while Miss Crispe who was as lank as if she had been drawn through a ring, maliciously wished she were their fairy godmother, that she might change them into a couple of mushrooms, which they were not much unlike below, being disproportionately short and stout.

Alice was in exquisite beauty; yesterday's cloud had passed over; she looked particularly happy; and every body who observed her, complimented the aunts on her coming out so lovely. She had her little pride of appearance like the rest of her sex, and as the kind old ladies did not allow of sacrifices to tyrannical fashion for her any more than for themselves, she had compromised the difficulty by prevailing on them to supply her summer wardrobe with delicately tinted muslin raiment instead of with the soft

falling, neutral gray and drab materials in which their taste ordinarily disported itself.

"This has plenty of *stand-off* of its own, you know;" whispered she to Rachel, with laughing, blushing confidence, when she congratulated her on her airy flow of piuk and white drapery. "And it is such a very baby pattern that even Aunt Delia could not say it was too *modish*."

Modish, indeed! It was extremely elegant, and of the most dainty, crisp, filmy texture; nothing girls are so prettily girlish in as fresh muslins. Stiff silk is for dowagers, and for maidens whose bloom has gone off. In their yielding, affectionate disposition toward Alice, her excellent benefactresses were giving in at last to some of the minor pomps and vanities of the world; and they were all the more lovable for the weakness.

Lady Georgiana Warleigh, who appeared in the rectory garden with her son alone, condescended Alice over as narrowly as the damsel's shyness of her presence permitted. "She might be made into any thing," was her flattering criticism addressed to the delighted Miss Delia. "She might be made into any thing, though still I do not see how she could be more charming than she is. The consciousness of being loved gives her a sweet ease and grace that are as rare as they are precious; so few girls are natural in this generation, and when they assume naturalness it becomes the worst style of affectation, and they are coarse or hoydenish—*fast* is the right term I think." Lady Georgiana's word carried weight in matters of taste, though she was condemned as of the world, worldly.

Sinclair Ferrand was busy all the afternoon setting the big boys to their games, starting the races and so forth. Alice also was kept pretty well employed, Mr. More supporting her with fussy energy. She made him trot! She sent him hither and thither on messages to the mistress, to the tea-brewers, the cake-cutters, the aunts; and he went rejoicing, and never failed to reiterate at each new command with the cheerfulest satisfaction; "Make me useful, Miss Alice, pray make me useful!" as if she needed any urging!

Mortimer Warleigh watched him with an amused smile on his face, but he did not offer to lighten his labors or to wait on Sunshine's behests himself, not he! There he lay, indolently reclining in the shade with a sweet verberna in easy reach which his fingers were continually furling through for the sake of the delicious perfume. Miss Crispe, who had a habit of attaching a *sobriquet* to persons whom she did not reverence, designated him "Ornamental China," and privately entreated Sinclair Ferrand to move the cricket players to the further end of the meadow, lest an accidental ball should fly his way and do him a mischief. Rachel Withers reproved the wicked little woman, telling her it was wrong to laugh at his airs of languor; he was not very strong, and she was to recollect his recent catastrophe at Brookfall. She had rarely observed, Rachel said, that people capable of active exertion give themselves up to voluntary laziness: pleasure-loving, sensitive temperaments like his shrink from work as they would shrink from pain—it is pain to them in fact. Miss Crispe listened demurely, and replied that Rachel was the most good-natured creature

she knew; but in revenge for the little lecture, Rachel was thenceforward styled by her a "buffer" in the sense of being something soft to prevent hard words coming into collision with tender folks' feelings.

When the feast was over and the company dispersing, Alice came to Rachel with a basket of cake and strawberries which she was going to carry to a little boy in the village who was an invalid and could not share in the other children's holiday. They therefore walked down the hill in company, until just at the turn of the lane leading to the cliffs, they met Lady Georgiana Warleigh and her husband in his donkey-chair coming up. They stopped, and Rachel stopped, of course, but Alice walked forward without even bowing.

"Why does she avoid me?" said Lady Georgiana, gazing after her with a vexed expression; then without waiting for a reply, she asked if she had wound up triumphantly, if Mortimer had left before Rachel came away, if they were likely to meet him on the hill: and then they parted again, and Rachel pursued Alice, but did not overtake her until she was within a hundred yards of the cottage whither she was going.

"Why did you not wait for me, and why did you not acknowledge Lady Georgiana?" she asked, on coming up with her.

"I do not wish to know her," was the curt reply.

Rachel ventured on a gentle remonstrance, trying to make her see that it was neither right nor amiable to allow her fanciful antipathies to interfere with common courtesy. But she spoke to no purpose; Alice let her say her say without answering a word, and without being in the least persuaded, as might be seen from the firm, stern compression of her beautiful lips. Her face was like a mirror for reflecting every mood of her mind; she could not have played the hypocrite even if she had tried; but her vagaries were at times very disconcerting to her friends.

VII.

During the five or six weeks next ensuing Rachel Withers felt herself standing by, the one disinterested spectator before a most complicated game at cross-purposes. The drift of some of the players was evident enough, but that of others was profoundly enigmatical. Mr. More had a stealthy eye on the Sunshine of Brookfall, and Miss Delia secretly encouraged him; Sinclair regarded Alice as his own by right established, and she loved him with a strong, enduring love which habit had made a second nature to her; Mortimer Warleigh looked and perhaps longed, but he saw the nymph seldom, and whether Lady Georgiana wished in sober earnest to promote an attachment between her son and Alice puzzled several persons besides Rachel.

One morning toward the end of July, Sinclair Ferrand stopped at Rachel's gate to wish her good-by. The foreign tour was now finally settled, and she expected each day to hear the announcement of her friends starting. Sinclair brought the news.

"I am going to town to-morrow, and my father will follow with Alice and my aunts in a week's time; he can not get away any earlier," said the young man, and meditatively flicked a

fly from his horse's ear. "Yes, Miss Withers, I am off to-morrow;" and here he drew a long breath as if endeavoring to heave some weight off his mind.

"Is it not an occasion of rejoicing? I wish I were in your traveling shoes!" cried Rachel.

"Why not set off on a journey then? You have nobody but yourself to please. By the by, I want to ask you to look after Alice this week. My aunts never take long walks, and she will be left pretty much to her own devices. She does not like riding with the groom after her, and she must not ride alone."

Rachel promised to be her companion any day and every day in a walk, but she could not undertake to ride with her. Sinclair was satisfied, and said that would do—he would tell her to meet Rachel in the wood each day at eleven o'clock, if it was neither wet nor too sultry. That was settled; they had even shaken hands and exchanged mutual good wishes, but still he did not go. He had something on his mind to say that was not easy to bring out. Rachel guessed what it might be, and gave him an opening by asking if he had seen much of Mortimer Warleigh lately.

"No; in the first place I have not had time, and in the second he does not suit me," was the prompt answer. "He told me he had some thoughts of going abroad, and asked our route; but we had not quite decided on it then; indeed, I can not say, that we have quite decided on it now; arrangements are so often changed at the last moment. You will be here, I suppose, when we come back?"

"That depends upon how long you stay away."

"Until the end of October, the doctor says; but I plead for a winter in Italy for Alice, and a return home next spring;" and so he lifted his hat and rode away, all the more lightly because he had secured Sunshine from solitary rambles that might be encroached on, and intimated to Rachel not to further Mortimer Warleigh's possible pursuit by giving him any information as to their traveling plans.

He had not been out of sight many minutes when Mr. More came trotting up the lane.

"How d'ye do, Miss Withers, how d'ye do? Busy as a bee amongst your flowers this morning!" cried he; "any commands for Brookfall? I am on my way thither now."

Rachel thanked him and said, no, and off he went.

He was very often on his way to Brookfall now, and he looked as fussy and jubilant as if he had agreeable business and met a cordial welcome there. Rachel wished him any thing but good speed; and would have warned Sinclair had she dared, that in his anxiety to stave off Mortimer Warleigh, he was overlooking the much more imminent danger of Mr. More with Aunt Delia to hack him.

The next morning she was preparing for her promised walk with Alice when Miss Delia on her way from the school dropped in to say it was such a pity the dear child should lose the last of her rides that Mr. More had kindly offered to escort her as Sinclair was in the habit of doing. Perhaps Rachel's face became rather quizzically expressive on hearing this, for Miss Delia colored and asked: "What now? Why do you look so significant?"

Rachel might well look significant, and the old lady felt she had betrayed her match-making plot to one person who looked on it with shrewd disapproval. Neither Dr. Ferrand nor his son had been taken into her counsels yet, and not until recently her sister Flora. The beautiful scheme was her own conception entirely, and Mr. More had entered into it with inexpressible satisfaction. But it had been kept very quiet and nobody besides themselves knew of it, unless it were the all-observing and all-suspecting Miss Crispe. Miss Delia now therefore invited Rachel to walk home with her to luncheon that she might have the opportunity of talking her over to her own views. Miss Flora was out in the village on errands of charity, and as she did not come in while Rachel was up at Brookfall, she heard no personal expression of her opinions, but she imagined they must be widely at variance with her sister's; for as she listened to Miss Delia she grew more and more surprised at what might be called the *worldliness* of her views on matrimony.

"Let me assure you, Rachel, that Mr. More is one of the most eligible men of our acquaintance;" said she, with some majesty in answer to a rather disparaging remark of hers. "His means are large and his family is ancient. He will make Alice a liberal settlement though she has no fortune, and we feel most happy—that is, I do—in getting her provided for so well and so early. It is a sign of great generosity that he is anxious to marry a girl in her peculiar position."

Rachel could not see it—there could be no special generosity she thought in an elderly man desiring to appropriate to himself a beautiful wife of seventeen, and she ventured to say as much; adding that he was old enough to be Alice's father.

"You have taken an aversion to him, Rachel, that is what you have done," returned the old lady, peevishly. "And I can not at all guess what you find to dislike. To me he appears truly admirable and unexceptionable in every way. His principles are fixed, his temper is amiable, and his disposition is Christian—he has the root of the matter and that is worth all besides. I can not tell you to how many of the societies he gives annual subscriptions. Perhaps he is a little too old according to popular notions, but I have considered his superior age an advantage rather than otherwise. She is such a thoughtless thing and he has ballast enough for both; if we allowed her freedom of choice and rejection in this important matter, it would never be ended: she is too young really to know her own mind."

"I should think that the best reason in the world for leaving her time to find it out," said Rachel.

"It was not so when Flora and I were young. If a girl received an eligible offer, her parents accepted it, and she was married without any nonsense," was the conclusive reply. Here Alice, poor, unconscious darling, returned from her ride, came into the room singing and swinging her hat by the ribbons, when Miss Delia immediately asked, "Sunshine, don't you like Mr. More?"

"Oh, yes, very much. He is a dear little man," said she, with the most perfect indifference; and flashed out of the window again, while

her aunt darted at Rachel a glance of triumphant satisfaction.

"I am no more convinced than ever," exclaimed she. "No, not a whit more convinced—quite the reverse, indeed!"

"Admit that you are rather romantic in your views of life," returned Miss Delia, with a provoking air of superior wisdom. "The 'dear little man' is stealing his way quietly into Alice's affections, and if she is not drawn aside into dangerous society, we shall soon have her looking up to him with reverence and admiration, and, by degrees, assimilating all her tastes and sentiments to his—a most desirable result; for her freakishness is often a source of heavy disquietude to dear Flora and myself. I lie awake many hours in the night thinking of her, poor darling."

"If her freakishness is bad for you, what will it be for him?" murmured Rachel. "It will be like yoking a skittish filly with a sober, fagged old carriage horse, and then setting them off down hill with no drag on."

"Pray do not rush into such violent similes, my dear! If the coach is upset, *you* will not be in it! Let them once come to an understanding and they will pull very nicely together. Mr. More is always ready to make allowance for her youth and high spirits. I think she likes him quite well enough already, and a good girl ought never to show her feelings until the declared preference of a lover courts her to do so. And you know when she is married she will be *safe*—no one can take her out of the hands of a husband. Twice since she has left school, Mr. Gilsland has hinted at the propriety of her paying a lengthened visit to him and his wife in London. We have never told her, for the possibility of such a thing would set her almost beside herself; and, fortunately, this promised tour abroad puts it off for the present. But the dread of it hangs over us, and if I seem rather urgent and hasty about getting her settled, you need not be surprised any longer. It would not seem like losing the dear child to have her no further off than Welsbeck. And even you, Rachel, must admit that she will be happier with Mr. More than she would be abandoned to her uncle again. I do not like his recent letters at all."

"I am not quite sure of that—a marriage is irremediable, but a visit, however unpleasant, comes to an end," said Rachel. "If I were you, I should consult the doctor and Sinclair."

"But neither the doctor nor Sinclair could keep her here if Mr. Gilsland were determined to have her back. She would be a prize in his sort of society, with her beauty and talent, and I would risk any thing rather than expose her to its contamination. She would be a fortunate girl in many points to win Mr. More—look at his pretty place at Welsbeck, his nice establishment—we go nowhere where things are in more exquisite order. Then consider his good family connections," and so Miss Delia went on, mouth-ing over two or three titled names of his kinsfolk as if they were likely to bring Rachel round to her views of the question.

Money weighed with her too; she dilated with genuine satisfaction on the worldly advantages of the match, and while gratified that Mr. More should be of her own set, and a truly pious person, she was far from insensible to the pomps and

vanities and material good things he was anxious to share with Alice. Mr. Gilsland's intimation of his claim on his niece's company was a powerful incentive too, but Miss Delia's fears had exaggerated the danger. Alice could not be starved or beaten with impunity now, even were there any motive for it, which there was not; and, of the two evils, a visit to London would certainly be the least. Rachel therefore repeated her opinion as to the propriety of consulting the doctor and his son: and reflected comfortably on the absent Sinclair's behalf, that Alice was not the girl to be hustled into any thing against her will, much less then into a distasteful marriage.

"Well, my dear, say no more," sighed Miss Delia finally; "the charge of children is a great care; you do not know what it is or you would feel a little more sympathy in my endeavors to do the best for Alice. Let this be between ourselves. There is no mischief past undoing done yet; and in three or four days we shall be gone abroad out of every body's way. I trust you to keep my counsel on this matter, Rachel, since you have surprised it so prematurely; and though I admit you *may* feel an interest in our darling as all who know her do, still remember that it is no business of *yours* in any way. Do not think me rude, my dear, but you are rather apt to *interfere* now and then where it would be *wiser* did you *refrain*. It is a little failing which perhaps you are not aware of, but which will grow upon you if you do not watch yourself very carefully. Now, my dear, kiss me; we are the best of friends, though we have differences of opinion. Cousin Sara always said you were a good girl."

Rachel retired leaving Miss Delia in possession of the field. Perhaps it was not a very lively victory for the old lady, but she was so confident of her wisdom and good intentions that she remained fully resolved still to encourage Mr. More. One certainty Rachel had acquired from the debate—she had learnt that the ladies at Brookfield had no inkling of their nephew's pretensions to Alice. They had lived too long and too intimately together for their friends to suspect them of being in love. Only Mr. More was wider awake. Personal interest had sharpened his faculties, and he saw and understood quite enough to make his sentiments toward that "red-haired young fellow" any thing but benevolent. He had set his heart on Alice, and he was prepared to be jealous of whoever threatened to impede his success—of Sinclair or of Mortimer Warleigh—he could not stay to discriminate; both were dangerous, suspected persons while she was free; and the idea of Sinclair traveling abroad in her party was gall and wormwood to him. As the day of their departure approached his fears and misery increased until he looked as jaundiced as he felt. To let her go without a word was impossible, but the risk of that word! Would it be better to speak or to write? But if he wrote she might show his letter to Sinclair—oh, worry, worry, worry, and how that red-haired young fellow would laugh! He grew desperate as he thought of it! He almost wished once or twice he had never fallen in love, and what would be the end of it?

The end of it for the present was an extension of his torture. The day before that fixed

for the starting abroad, Dr. Ferrand was laid fast with the gout; and when Mr. Wilson saw him he gave it as his opinion that he would not be fit to travel for some weeks to come.

CHAPTER THE SECOND.

MR. MORE RECEIVES HIS QUIETUS.

TRUST her not—she is fooling thee.—LONGFELLOW.

I.

DOCTOR FERRAND'S hereditary enemy, the gout, could hardly have chosen a more inconvenient season than the present for paying him a visit—inconvenient, that is, for every body but Mr. More. To him the fates seemed singularly propitious. It deferred the tour abroad, in the first place; Sinclair returned from town to see what prospect of a start there was, and finding his father's attack was likely to be more tedious than dangerous, he joined some college friends in a yachting cruise to the Channel Islands for a month; and the foreign trip was delayed till September.

But what proved a hindrance to the traveler's plans, proved a furtherance to the impetuous Mr. More's. His feelings became quite too much for him, while he was seeing Alice and riding with her every day; and in a fatal moment he asked the question, and was answered with a very animated "No!" But he was not discouraged—far from it. Women should not be taken at their first word, he said, for their second thoughts were always best!

The effect of his proposal on Alice was very queer; she was so indignant! "Quite on her high horse!" cried Miss Delia. "Nobody must speak to her about it."

But for all nobody must speak to her about it, a very strong pressure was put on her at home, and she was very often indeed spoken to about it. One afternoon Rachel Withers caught her on the down alone; and though Alice laughed through her tears at the irresistibly ludicrous fancies conjured up by her lover's wooing, it vexed and wearied her more than enough to listen to her aunt Delia's reasonings and exhortations. They would have provoked a saint not of her own persuasion.

"Ah, my child!" she would say in her soft cooing voice which ought to have melted a heart of stone, but which somehow had the effect of hardening Alice's more. "Ah, my child, you do not know what life is, or how thankful you might some day come to be for the protection of such a one as Mr. More. He loves you, Alice, and there is an adage, 'Better be an old man's darling than a young man's slave!' And, ah! how true it is!" And here she would pause, mournfully wave her head, take a long breath and go on again monotonously; "Think how happy it would make us to keep you in our neighborhood, how comfortable you would be, how many opportunities of doing good you would find in your new sphere. Dear Alice, we shall force you to nothing, but you are, *indeed* you are setting a stubborn face against what seems a very enviable lot—a lot which hundreds of girls would gladly welcome!"

Alice for the most part sate dumbly hearing,

unconvinced and angry; but one day when Rachel was present she opened her mouth in a very unexpected retort. "Aunt Delia, though you are fond of Mr. More, he would be no society, help or comfort to me either in prosperity or adversity; and I have a great many just causes to show why we may not lawfully be joined together."

"You profane, naughty puss! you are actually quoting the marriage service!" exclaimed Miss Delia, shocked and horrified beyond words to utter her feelings. Alice neither excused nor defended herself but said simply; "Yes, she had been reading it." Miss Delia heaved a profound sigh and murmured; "Alice, you are turning out a sore disappointment! I have set my heart on you too much, and now I am punished."

It was cruel to harass the poor girl's feelings with words like these—implying an accusation of cold ingratitude; for what could she answer to such a charge? Her face paled, she compressed her lips and just held her peace. The doctor was laid up in his room, so that she had not him to fly to, and Sinclair was out of reach. Rachel Withers was the only person near who knew enough to take her part, unless it were her aunt Flora; and aunt Flora was almost overborne by her sister's pertinacity. She was not in grief about her persecution, which was well for her; she did not mope, or show any self-distrust, or signs of giving in; and if Mr. More had possessed only a common share of discernment he might have found out that instead of gaining any thing by pushing his proposal he was really making her hate him.

Miss Delia bade her state some of the many just causes she referred to as impediments to her union with Mr. More.

"He is fifty-seven and I am seventeen—" began she.

"How do you know Mr. More is fifty-seven?" interrupted Miss Delia. "I do not think he can possibly be so old."

"You may see it in the register," was the quiet reply; "he was born here and baptized by the name of Joseph Cornelius. I do not like the name and I do not like him either—he is utterly disagreeable to me."

"It is not a month since you said in this very room, before Rachel Withers too, that he was a dear little man and you liked him very much! How can you be so fickle and inconsistent?"

"A great many changes may take place in a month," answered Alice. "Whatever I did then I can not endure him now," and gathering up her work she left the room with a bright red flush on either cheek—always a significant sign that her patience was ebbing out and a stronger phase of rebellious temper getting the mastery of her.

II.

While Mr. More's tender affairs were in this unpromising position invitations were issued from Abbotsdene, a beautiful old country house belonging to Earl Rashleigh about ten miles from Brookfall, for a great archery meeting and luncheon in the grounds. The excellent old ladies were at first decidedly for refusing it, but Alice looked plaintive and that led to its being taken into further consideration. Whether

archery is a Christian sport or not — that was the question; and the arguments thereupon led, as such arguments invariably do, to something very like profanity. After much vain talk, however, it was decreed that to draw the bow is an act in itself innocent, that to draw the bow in society is likely to promote good fellowship amongst neighbors, and that fellowship amongst neighbors is a very good thing in its way; therefore Miss Delia whose was the first and last dissentient voice, reluctantly consented to let Alice go, and go herself to take care of her. Miss Flora then thought she also should enjoy the drive, and the fourth seat in the brougham was offered to Rachel Withers who gladly accepted it; for there was a chance Grace Hill might be present and she had not seen her now for two or three years.

Archery is the prettiest outdoor sport we have left us in which ladies can take part. Perhaps it may be adapted to purposes of flirtation, as cautious Miss Delia suggested; but so also is a missionary meeting in a village barn, or church decorating at Christmas-tide, or any other mixed assemblage when young men and women are flirtatiously disposed. At Abbotsdene the company came from far and near, and as the day was brilliantly fine, the scene on the long sloping lawn before the house was very charming and pictorial, but it was a most pictorial place. The mansion was ancient — a fine broken line of building with depths of shadow between its masses of masonry that the sunshine never fathomed; windows stone-mullioned and projecting; and the porch with a crown of ivy centuries old.

Mortimer Warleigh was present, not as an assistant in the games but as a leisurely onlooker. He abjured active exercise and seemed to consider his whole duty lay in looking beautiful — a duty which he performed to every body's admiration. Rachel Withers found him in company with the Hills; Grace looking stronger and fresher than formerly, and her husband with quite the dignitary air in his archdeacon's hat.

While the shooting was going forward Grace and Rachel had a quiet chat apart on family matters; Mortimer lying on the grass near the shady nook where they had esconced themselves, but too intent on Alice to heed any body else.

Alice to her great chagrin had been claimed as his partner by Mr. More, who, to her certain knowledge, had never practiced at a target until the day before; but in Sinclair's absence she was obliged to put up with him, for she had no other friend in the gathering who took part in the sport.

When they had talked over Katherine and her children, Arthur's promotion and clerical jealousies in his neighborhood, Grace began to watch her nephew and to say half fondly, half contemptuously,

"Look at that lazy boy; he puts Arthur quite out of patience when he comes to stay with us. He does nothing all day but lie in the sun, dreaming and drowsing as he is doing now, and Georgiana writes me word that he has fallen in love again!" Rachel could not help echoing that again with some surprise. "Oh, yes; it is for the third or fourth time," was the reply. "I

thought him very much in earnest last year with a pretty, modest girl, his tutor's daughter, but it was out of sight out of mind in a month; and now I do not believe he can put his whole strength into either doing or loving any thing."

Rachel could form a tolerably accurate guess, but nevertheless she asked who was the present whim of his fancy. Grace replied that she must know her, for she was a girl at Claymire, the adopted daughter of two pious eccentric ladies who lived there. Of course, in this description she recognized Alice and pointed her out standing just opposite to them. Alice had her bow raised in the act to shoot; her arrow flew from the string and struck the target in the red; then she stepped back a pace or two, turning as she did so toward the spot where Rachel and Grace sat.

"She is very lovely," was Grace's verdict; then lowering her voice she whispered: "Lady Georgiana is not so ambitious for her favorite son as might have been expected; for she says if Mortimer has set his heart on this girl he shall have her."

"There go always two words to strike that sort of bargain," responded Rachel, smiling.

"Mortimer wins more love than he gives. Few girls with disengaged affections could resist him, and she, I am told, was only a poor clergyman's niece." Rachel said she was the niece of Mr. Gilsland whose name was well known in certain circles. "Indeed!" cried Grace, "I did not hear that, and I should think it no desirable connection. Arthur dislikes the man exceedingly. Your old lover has got up in the world but not by a very straight ladder. But who is that dapper little gentleman who attends on the young lady with such a punctilious courtesy now?"

"An old friend of her aunts," replied Rachel, but faithfully kept Mr. More's sentimental secret though Grace would have enjoyed it.

"An old beau of her own," rejoined she and laughed. "An old beau with pretensions, Rachel, or I am very much mistaken."

After this Grace began to speak of her brother Oliver and his wife.

"They are always straitened for money, and Arthur and I can not make out how it is," said she. "Lady Georgiana is not the selfish person to stint for the sake of keeping a private purse; and it is wonderful how she, with her former lavish habits, can reconcile herself to their present penurious living. Poor Oliver is lucky in his wife if in nothing else. He is very trying, but she is most beautifully patient. I never thought there was so much good in her till his illness called it forth. They have no old debts, for those Laurence paid long ago; and Mortimer has no private extravagances; but still they appear and spend as if they had less than a fourth of their nominal income."

Rachel could give no clue whatever to the understanding of the mystery; and only said her godmamma Grandage and she had observed the same evidences of narrow means about them when they saw them in London during the year of the Great Exhibition.

"It has been so ever since they went to live in Paris before Oliver's first attack, and it puzzles all of us. We can not ask Lady Georgiana for an explanation, for she never complains and

never begs; and she is not easy to talk to when she chooses to be close about any matter."

At this moment some friends of Grace Hill who were strangers to Rachel approached their pleasant retreat and there was no more opportunity for conversation until the day's sports were ended. But Rachel had plenty given her whereon to meditate. Lady Georgiana's words were disquieting. "If he has set his heart on this girl he shall have her." Perhaps she would acquiesce in this alliance to avert the chance of his susceptibility plunging him into a lower. But in Rachel's estimation Sunshine was far too good for him; he was not worth her worth; and it would have grieved her just then to think it possible he might win her. Rachel's kind sympathies and good wishes were, in fact, all with Sinclair Ferrand. But love is often unequal and for any thing she knew Alice's fancy might be caught in the handsome young Fowler's net already. There were symptoms that showed not unlike it. He spoke to her often at Abbotsdene, and her manner in replying was always more or less conscious. To be sure, her aunt Delia had an eye upon her, and Mr. More had another and a very jealous one, so that perhaps she was confused by their watchfulness as much as from any other cause; but it would have been as well—perhaps better—had no warning been addressed to her about him, though that mischief, if mischief it were, was done beyond retrieval. Rachel fancied she liked to talk about him, and she certainly betrayed a shy inquisitiveness to know any thing that Rachel could or would tell her of his life and conversation; and Rachel, being on her guard and prejudiced, made this very little. She wished Sinclair Ferrand were at home again to look after his Sunshine before he lost her!

III.

The day after the archery meeting at Abbotsdene Alice was down at Rachel Withers' cottage soon after two o'clock begging for her company in a walk, and as there was rather more wind than was pleasant on the downs they went through the newly-mown meadows and growing corn to the Woodlands Manor Farm, and loitered some hours away in the quaint sheltered garden. Rachel trusted the aunts would not blame her,—for indeed it was no doing of hers and she would much rather it had never happened—but while they were resting on the soft cushiony slope of turf by the brook, each with an idle pencil and leaf of sketch-book in her hands, there appeared coming down the ancient steps from the house Mortimer Warleigh and the farmer's wife who was doing the honors of the placet to him according to her custom with strangers. He espied and recognized them at a glance, spoke a few words of dismissal to the good woman—probably explaining himself as their friend—for she nodded cheerfully, looked toward them, nodded again, and then vanished into the hall while he walked down the green alley to the spot where Rachel and her companion were resting.

Alice said nothing, but her fingers became in an instant diligent with her pencil at a minute bit of outlining from a crag in the chinks of which grew tufts of hard fern, glossy and fresh with the constant moisture. It was Rachel's instinct and habit to be good-natured to every

body; neither to man, woman, nor child could she give a rebuff, unless she received an immediate provocation. She knew some people who could and would have looked the intruder out of their company in five minutes, but she had not that chilling knack; and in less time than it has taken to record it, Mortimer was seated near Alice, also on the turf, had possessed himself of her sketch-book and pencil, and was finishing her tiny vignette with the swift, sharp, effective touches of a master. Rachel would have liked to know whether his coming was accidental, or whether he had seen and followed them; however, there he was and there he remained—visibly contented himself, and not taking away visibly from Alice's contentment.

It was a sleepy afternoon in that inclosed spot, though there was breeze enough in the open fields; the bees were humming in the honey flower that clothed the wild grown hedges beyond the brook and in the thousand luscious blossoms of the garden. Rachel fell away into a reverie and they talked, the two young ones. She heard their voices sounding far off and unreal as in a dream, uneasily, lazily feeling that she ought to end this—that she ought either to go away with Alice or to get rid of Mortimer; but she did neither. Alice and she had come there to spend the afternoon, and without some clumsy excuse for going, how were they to go? And if they went would not he go too? "Perhaps," thought she with an inward sigh, "there is a fate in it," and that resigned her to her difficulties.

The hours might be silver-winged to them for aught she knew, but to her they were weighted with lead. It was three o'clock when Mortimer came down into the garden; at six o'clock the shadows began to creep into the pleached alleys and the drowsy-sounding bees to fly homeward to their hives ranged under the warm house wall, but still he was there; silent for long intervals, and then quoting some sweet line while his ready pencil was busy on the fair pages of Alice's sketch-book. The crisp sound of rending paper made Rachel presently look up, and she found him tearing out a leaf.

"Let me see your drawing," said she, and held out her hand bending forward to take it from his.

Alice was gazing at the sketch with the rosiest smile.

"I may keep it?" Mortimer said to her.

"If you wish it. I did not know what you were doing."

After a moment's hesitation he passed the leaf to Rachel, smiling as he did so and peering expressively out of his eyes as if he would have asked what she thought. She thought it was a lovely face he had outlined rising Naiad-like from the brook, that it had a lovely glimpse of Alice in it, that it was somehow a pity he had ever found her there, that the sooner they parted the better—a dreamy, confused, self-reproaching, self-defending tangle of thinkings which she could not disentangle; only she had a dull, sorrowful impression left on her mind that what was done was done amiss—had been more wisely never done at all. Mortimer was quick and sensitive; perhaps in her face he read more clearly what she was feeling than she could have expressed it; for he now prepared to leave them,

putting up his treasure with a very tender care. Alice watched him, smiling.

"Good by—this has been a beautiful hour," said he, and threw a glance round about the place. "And what a sky will that be to-night when the sun sets," pointing to the windy gleams and clouds blown between the openings of the trees in the west. And with that he went away, and they sat down again, neither of them prone to talk much; both of them busy in their hearts and perhaps not quite easy. Soon they were obliged to follow, and his figure was before them in the distance all the way until he came to the sudden dip of the hill where it seemed to go down to the sea; and then they lost him.

"You will tell your aunt Delia who has been with us, Sunshine," Rachel said, keeping fast her hand for a moment at parting. Alice looked at her frankly, and said, "Yes," then went away with a smile on her lips.

IV.

It happened from a variety of little hindrances that Rachel Withers did not see Alice again after this for nearly a fortnight; but one morning early she presented herself at the cottage, looking so literally over-brimming with a species of dolorous fun that it was evident her affairs were come to a crisis. Rachel had watched Mr. More ride by daily on his road to Brookfall, and the moment Alice entered her thoughts jumped at once to the conclusion she desired to see; what then was her astonishment and mortification when the damsel announced in half a dozen words that she had promised to *consider of the little man*.

"To consider of him—actually promised to consider of him! Oh, Alice, do you know what you are doing?" cried Rachel, with a positive sinking at her heart.

"Yes; I saw there was going to be no peace until I did. It was tease, worry, fret, all day long, and now I hope I shall be rid of the subject for a little while," responded she, pulling off her hat and throwing it down impatiently. "And besides, it will check aunt Delia's fidgetiness about somebody else," and here she paused, hesitated and grew scarlet. Rachel thought could Miss Delia have used *somebody else* as a lever to urge Alice into this folly of follies by way of strongest denial?

For some minutes both were silent, Rachel watching Alice in inexpressible dismay while she took up her scissors and began to shape and clip with considerable care what turned out when finished to be a pair of paper spectacles, which she deliberately fitted on to her own features. "Now," said she, when she had adjusted them, "I am going to show you what he looks like."

Rachel interrupted her with all the solemnity at her command, exclaiming:

"No, Alice, no! If you are going to marry Mr. More it is quite time you gave up making fun of him."

She did not appear to see it from that point of view at all; for daintily setting the paper rims on her naughty little nose, she replied,

"But I must; you are my only chance. If I don't find a safety-valve in you I shall break out again at home, and then I don't know what will become of me. You must not tell—the

more cross you are the better you will represent me;" and then the very wicked, circumventing puss, in spite of Rachel's half-averted and wholly disapproving eyes, sat on the edge of her chair, turned in her toes, measured her thumbs, stared at her pathetically and pumped up such a sigh! "That is it exactly—I have read two or three love-stories, and the courting was not a bit like it. I am *quite* disappointed," and here she stared and sighed again with the most provoking comicality.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Alice," murmured Rachel.

"But I am not. Oh! what a Deddy Doldrum he is!" cried she, in a sudden but intense freak of exasperation, jumping up and walking to the window. "I wish Sinclair were here to put an end to him—he would."

"You must never marry Mr. More with such feelings as these, Alice; it would be wicked," said Rachel earnestly.

"I don't intend!" was her confidential answer. "But aunt Delia teased so, and would accuse me of growing into a liking for somebody else—as if I could when Sinclair is there! and to prevent her, I just agreed to consider of Mr. More—only to *consider* of him, you know, Rachel; and now I shall try to tire him out. Oh! his blue spectacles, and the squeak-leather in his boots! I never could be fond of any body who had squeak-leather in his boots, could you?"

Rachel would not have laughed had it been in primmest human nature to resist the temptation; but the child, though behaving abominably, looked so droll in her paper rims and wicked humor, that her better principles were overcome; and when she was able to set her countenance for serious remonstrance Alice crumpled her up with a hasty embrace and said, she need not begin to scold, for *she* was not going to listen; she had been driven into her naughtiness, and Rachel might go and lecture those whose fault it was instead.

Rachel only succeeded in making her hear that she was using poor Mr. More very ill, to which she retorted,

"And is not *poor* Mr. More using *me* very ill? He must know I find him dull company. When first he asked me to marry him did I not say 'No,' as plain as tongue could speak? Have I not told him since I should be dead with moods in a month; that I wished he would ask aunt Delia instead; that I did not like him half so well as I used to do, and for all that he would persist in teasing my life out. He is far more to blame than I am. And he gets into such tantrums, Rachel! However, I have done with him now I am *considering*, he is forbidden to come to Brookfall for one whole week that the staid equilibrium of my thoughts may not be disturbed, and it feels like the beginning of holidays. Don't look grave—they made me do it. As I said to aunt Dee,—if I marry him, I shall be obliged to bear with him then, but I *won't* bear with him now."

"You admit the possibility of your marrying him ultimately then."

"No, I do not! I would throw myself over the cliffs first," was the answer in a tone that rang as if she meant it.

"I trust you will do neither the one nor the other," replied Rachel coolly, "but you should

have persisted in holding on to your first 'No,' and the matter would have taken its inevitable turn soon."

"You are not comfortable this morning—nobody is comfortable. I think I shall go away. When I said I would *consider*, I warned them I did not mean to change my mind; but if you had two people worrying at you all day long to do something you hated you would be glad of a little respite too! Sinclair, dear Sinclair, is all the real refuge I have, and he is away!"

Looking up in her excited face, Rachel saw the tears shining through the impromptu spectacles, and for the life of her she could not forbear a smile. It vexed Alice, for she snatched them off, and flung them on the table, exclaiming pettishly, "You are very unkind! There—I will leave you those as a memento of this day when I am so *happy* and you can *laugh* at me!" And then with a stormy change of mood she burst into a passion of sobbing and crying, and declared that it was horrid of aunt Delia to urge her to marry that most tiresome and disagreeable of mousy men; but she would not, no she would not, and oh! what would she not give if only dear Sinclair were at home!

When the fit had spent itself Rachel proposed a walk by way of settling her perturbed spirits. "Not further than the rectory gardens then," Alice stipulated; and to the rectory gardens they betook themselves and walked about under the trees for a long while talking over her persecutions and difficulties. Rachel feared once she was preparing for tears again; but catching a glimpse of the doctor's head at the study window, she changed her intentions, and stopping suddenly short in the footpath, exclaimed that she would go and talk to him—there he was, down-stairs again for the first time! Her countenance brightened at the inspiration; and bidding Rachel wait until she came back away she flew to her safest and most judicious counselor. Rachel staid and staid on until she was weary, but finding that Alice did not return as her two o'clock dinner-hour drew on, she departed, hoping that the long interview would have the good result of giving Mr. More his quietus.

And it had. The doctor was alarmed, vexed, indignant—he knew his son's hopes if no one else did. He thought Mr. More's pretensions outrageous; and after the poor little man had been talked to by his spiritual pastor and master he very sadly and reluctantly withdrew them. The aunts also were talked to and acquiesced in their brother's judgment; Miss Flora with visible relief; Miss Delia with a still continuing protest that she knew what was best for Alice and that the match she had tried to make for her was a *good* match.

V.

The doctor being out of his room again and his old enemy put to flight, the preparations for the tour abroad, which it was now arranged should last through the winter, were resumed. The evening before they set off Rachel spent at Brookfall. Miss Delia was thoroughly out of sorts, and not unnaturally; for she was very much disappointed and mortified at the total overthrow her plans had undergone.

"I should like to see the Griselda spirit pre-

vailing a little more amongst women nowadays, but it seems almost extinct," observed she, with a profound sigh aimed at Alice, who was leisurely gathering together the pretty things on the drawing-room table preparatory to their departure from home.

Alice paused with a slender pearl hook-cutter in her hand, and tapping her lips with it as if admonishing them not to bubble over in any naughtiness, said, "Griselda was Griselda for a lord whom she loved," and went on piling up the nicknacks with a very careful patience.

"Pshaw!" snapt Miss Delia. "She was Griselda because it was her *duty* to be Griselda, if you use her name as synonymous with the virtue she exemplifies. I wish you would cultivate a plainer manner of speaking, for we are not poetical people at our time of life, and can not always understand you!" Alice took her aunt's pshaw! and rebuff very kindly; she was quite happy and at ease again; for on the morrow they were to start on their journey, and she should see Sinclair. But Miss Delia was indubitably cross for several days.

Whether *that other person* alluded to by Sunshine in her complaint to Rachel was mentioned in her plea to the doctor neither the aunts nor Rachel ever knew. They met no more for the present after that beautiful hour in the garden at Woodlands, and Alice went away as blithe as a bee, with never a care on her heart so far as her friends could tell. And Mortimer appeared perfectly contented too. Rachel saw him in the cliff-lane sketching the morning after Alice left Brookfall. They talked awhile together, but he did not mention her, and looked as drowsily at his ease as a child who has never heard the name of Love. Rachel did not understand it; she had almost feared the existence of a mutual preference, notwithstanding Sunshine's disclaimers when speaking of her aunt Delia's persecutions; but she was not sorry for her mistake. Nothing she would sooner suffer in vain than empty fears—nothing she would sooner see blown off in harmless vapor of idle fancy than the clouds that seemed to threaten the happiness of those she loved.

But Lady Georgiana, foiled, as she believed, by her son's negligence alone, in a matter that was fast becoming almost equivalent with her to life and death, saw the Brookfall party go with deepest vexation and disappointment. She had come to Claymire, braving risks which her first meeting with Alice showed to be very imminent, in the design of undoing in part the great, the terrible wrong she had done. What her life had been and was with the perpetual terror of discovery hanging over her, words can not utter. Her base instruments were become her tyrants; penury and scant living were the least tortures their rapacity caused her to endure. She was trying to outwit them now, and it was a desperate attempt—she must gain all, or lose all; and in her new scheme she worked alone, aware that a suspicion would be ruin. She had set her heart on Mortimer's marrying Alice; and her knowledge of his susceptibility had seemed at first to make the matter easy; she was sure that had he entered into her wishes he might have won her, so high was her opinion of his endearing qualities. But here was her difficulty—she could not tell him what her wishes were; she

could only guide him to desire the girl himself; and after she had given him an intimation that he would meet with no opposition from her, discretion and caution both bade her desist, and give the charm time to work itself.

When Alice was gone, however, she could not refrain from asking him how he had sped.

"I have sped none at all," was his reply. "She is beyond my reach; I might look and long forever, but those grapes would not drop for me. Besides, mother, she loves Sinclair and he her."

Lady Georgiana was sarcastic both at her son's expense and at Sinclair's—she was sure Sinclair's rivalry would soon fall effaced before him if he put his heart into his efforts.

"I could love her," then added the young man, musingly. "It is a lovely face!"

She said no more, but she inwardly resolved that when Alice returned from abroad she should be compelled to go to Mr. Gilsland's house, where Mortimer could have opportunities of seeing her every day. "If I wanted to keep them apart they would rush together to defy me," thought she; "now I would fain they did, both are indifferent. If they were married, the world might come to an end to-morrow!"

By the world's coming to an end she meant that the secret crime which was such a yoke about her own and her wretched husband's neck might be found out and she would hardly heed it! But she wanted to save to her favorite son all she had sinned for. Once secure of Alice for him, she thought she would venture all and tell Sir Laurence. By day and by night she brooded over it. Three persons living beside herself were in the secret—Mr. Gilsland, Nurse Lupton, and Dr. Frith. If any one of them got an inkling of her designs, they would make haste and be beforehand with her in a revelation of the crime. Guilt always distrusts its tools. Alice had seen recognition in her eyes, and this was a danger, but not so great a danger as the other. She did not know how suspicion had hovered from the first over the little grave in Hurtleale churchyard, or she would have known that her risks lay on every hand manifold and full of life; ready to spring a mine under her feet at any hour, went she to work on her new scheme ever so cautiously. Fate is deeper, more wily, more treacherous and more unerring than the strongest sinner; in its hands Lady Georgiana was mere half-burnt tow; certain sooner or later to be broken asunder and cast abroad on the whirlwind she had sown.

CHAPTER THE THIRD.

SUSPICION BUDS AGAIN.

FOUL deeds will rise though all the world o'erwhelm them.
SHAKESPEARE.

I.

It is true enough that one half of the world does not know how the other half lives. Carrie Martin's existence was a queer, practical commentary on the threadbare text, of woman's rights and woman's wrongs. If she had been a man ever so, she could not have been happier, freer or more independent of the world and its conventional ways than she was. The cheerful isolation of her habits would not have suited

her friend Rachel Withers, but then Rachel had never had the same hardships to knead her out of the common mold of her sex. Here was Carrie in her bachelor-looking lodgings, alone for the most part; in the morning spinning her various webs; then to the reading-room of the British Museum in the exercise of her vocation; afterward to dine in some pleasant company, for she was a person of many friends; and often of an evening on foot to the opera, where she doffed her bonnet, sat in a stall, forgot the work-a-day world in a revelry of music, and walked home again without a doubt or a fear. Women are very different creatures hedged round with petting, care, and tender watchfulness, to what they become when set by fortune to stand alone, and help and keep and support themselves.

Carrie Martin had her lodgings now in the same house as the Oliver Warleighs, and the owner of it was Mrs. Lupton. It was the house where Rachel had seen the Oliver Warleighs during the year of the Exhibition, but Carrie had not been in it long. Their rooms were taken by the term, and always kept in readiness for them. They had the whole of the first floor, and Carrie was over them; her apartments being at the back of the house for quietness sake, and also for the broad glimpse of blue sky and green gardens she could get up there, better than below. It was a dreary neighborhood, but she was satisfied with it; and here Rachel Withers visited her during the spring after her friends the Ferrands went abroad with Alice.

When Rachel heard the landlady's name it did not occur to her as familiar, but when she saw the woman, she thought she possessed the most sleeky evil countenance she had ever beheld; and so she told Carrie, adding that if she lived in her house she should be afraid some night she should be murdered in her bed. Carrie only laughed, and said she had never yet been worth murdering.

"But you are right in your antipathy to her face," she continued, "she is a suspicious character, and on that account she interests me. Also she is an admirable cook; she is very clean, and does not meddle with books or papers; she takes less toll off my coffee, sugar and wine than any landlady who ever experimentalized on my liberality before, and I give as little trouble as a single gentleman; so that, in fact, we are on excellent terms together. I have two ideas concerning her, and am now on the watch to prove which is the true one; she is either a member of the female detective police, or else she is herself a criminal not yet found out.

"I would not stay here; I would go to some respectable commonplace body without a mystery," said Rachel seriously.

"Not at all—why should I? I am safe, being on my guard, but safest as having nothing for her to covet. Besides, she amuses me. She has had her adventures, and delights to expatiate on them. I feel it expedient sometimes to check her indiscretions of speech lest she should afterward repent of her confidence, and become afraid of me; which, from her eye, *might* be dangerous. When she brings up our coffee after dinner I will set her going."

Rachel begged Carrie not to set her going for *her*, as she would greatly prefer dispensing with her society; but Carrie liked her own way, and when Mrs. Lupton appeared with the fragrant beverage, she detained her on one pretense or another until the restraint of Rachel's presence as a stranger wore off, and she followed her lodger's dexterous lead toward the ever self-interesting topic of her own remarkable sayings and doings. She appeared like a woman with a perfect digestion; her features were large and handsome, her skin healthy and blooming, but her long eyes were half closed and sly, and her mouth was stretched into a perpetual smirk, which became a grin when she was recounting an unpleasant story—and sooth to say, most of her stories were unpleasant. One very necessary caution she practiced even while indulging her loquacity—she never mentioned names, either of persons or of places.

"There are queer things in families, oh! very queer things!" cried she once, shaking her head and peering through her drooped eyelids as if she saw, and in imagination enjoyed, a long vista of calamities, the bringing about of which lay in her own immediate power. "If every body had their own, there would be a deal of upsetting of them that are high and of lifting up of them that are low. Yes, as I say, if every body only had their own!"

"A nurse has perhaps more opportunity of making acquaintance with private skeletons than any body," suggested Carrie, drawing her on.

"You are right, ma'am. Somebody *must* be trusted, that is it. I never met the man or woman yet who could keep a bad secret to themselves, and not go mad or die under it. I was reading a word or two in a paper that was lying here on your table yesterday, that went to prove how doctors were not likely to know much of the romance of life; bless the man that wrote it, thought I, it was never an *old* doctor that told you *that*! Why, doctors are confessors to us Protestants, and next to them come the lawyers; and perhaps nurses and waiting-women are not far behind, only they're told of necessity often while things are in the acting; and the doctors only hear the tale when the deed's done and past undoing, and misery begins to set in and break down the health. Now I knew a doctor once—and if I had any guilt on my conscience it is not *him* I would send for when I was dying—who could not keep a quiet tongue in his teeth, he didn't know what was harmless gossip he might amuse his patients with, and what was real tragedy that he had learnt as good as under seal of confession. It was about a pretty young widow with two boys, who came to live in a country place where I was then in a very good service. My mistress was for calling on her, but first she must know a little of her belongings, and she asked our doctor, who was attending on the stranger, what he knew. He hummed and he hawed, and for that time he kept safe counsel; the lady was desirous of living secluded, he said; she was not well off, and she had her two sons to bring up; but she *was* a lady—oh! yes, quite a lady of manners and education. So my mistress, who was oldish, and rich, and fond of somebody new, called on her, and they were getting

quite to be friends. The widow had had her troubles, but being of a pious spirit she was slowly grieving down, as I heard my mistress say, when her doctor must needs blab how the poor young creature had told him in her very great agony when she first came to the town, that the father of her children, her own husband that she'd once loved, had been *hanged*—hanged in Ireland something like a month before, and that for murder done in a drunken brawl. She had come away from all that knew her to hide their shame, and brought her sons where they might live to grow up and never hear of it. And what does her doctor do but tell my mistress, and she told me, and soon it was every body's secret. Then folks looked curious, or shy, or pitiful of the poor creature, and so she took her children and went away somewhere else—God knows where, but I never saw her after. And thinks I to myself, what mischief and misery more than there is, would there be in the world if nobody had any more discretion than our old doctor!"

Here Mrs. Lupton paused to take breath and apparently to angle in the dark depths of her memory for some other grotesque anecdote. She was not long in drawing one to the surface. "And speaking of persons coming wrongfully by what they hold, and nurses knowing of their private skeletons," said she; "I remember once hearing of a nurse who took a temporary place with a very great lady who had charge of a child amongst her own that stood between her and money. Her husband hated the child, but he was one of them men that stop short, not for want of will but for want of courage, and the deed would never have been done but for his wife; and she got rid of her out of the country, making believe that she was dead who is alive this day. And that nurse *knew* it, she did, and some other folks *suspected* all was not right, but there was no stir made, and hasn't been yet, no, nor ever will be! But if that great lady could undo her doing now, oh! but she would; for things fell out so after, that she had no profit of it; not so much as to pay for keeping it dark. That nurse has told me she's seen her raging like a player on the stage. If she could make a compromise with God about it, that it should never be found out, but the wrong righted in some quiet, safe way, I do think she would be content to die the moment it was done! But there are them in it will hinder her. I've had a sort of pity for that lady ever since I heard it, for she is very high and proud in her ways and in her family. Ay, and I could tell you——" what more Mrs. Lupton could have told them was lost for the present; for the street-door bell rang and she left the room.

"Mrs. Lupton is herself the nurse who assisted in that last little tragedy or I am very much mistaken," remarked Carrie Martin. "She has told me the tale before but with variations. People should not meddle with lying unless they have excellent memories."

Rachel was shocked and she began to ask her friend how she could endure to remain under such a woman's roof: but Carrie replied with a careless laugh that there was something everywhere to dislike, and that she preferred a mystery combined with exquisite cleanliness to other evils she had met with in London lodgings.

She was never anywhere so comfortable before. "Besides," added she; "I have not fathomed her character yet, and how can you expect me to leave my sport—it is all in the exercise of my vocation. Mrs. Lupton has her religious observances like the best of us, and who am I that I should say she is worse than her neighbors? It will not do to go about the world condemning people because they happen to have an unpleasant grin or a furtive look in their eyes. Your friends the Oliver Warleighs treat her with great confidence, and she uses me honestly enough."

"I don't care; I would not lodge in her house if I were you," persisted Rachel.

"Of course not—neither should I if I were as timid and ingrained with proprieties as you; but I am not. I have some acquaintances so eccentric you would think them ready for Bedlam. Come, dear old sober-sides, don't look so solemnly disapproving, but put on a black silk mantle over your black silk dress, and a bonnet that will not care for crushing, and let us go out and hear some music."

Rachel did not feel as if this were quite proper either, but to Carrie Martin it was a mere matter of custom; so she did as she was bidden, and they went to the Lyceum and heard Bosio, Mario and Ronconi in the *Barber of Seville*; and Rachel after all enjoyed it as much as if she had gone in full dress and under masculine escort. Carrie took a very practical view of woman's rights—especially of woman's right to enjoy herself, when she has achieved independence or had it thrust upon her. And not a sensible person of her acquaintance had ever thought she did other than wisely or esteemed her a great deal the less for having courage to be happy in her own way.

11.

Rachel Withers had been only two days in town with her friend when the Oliver Warleighs arrived to take possession of their apartments in Mrs. Lupton's house. They had been spending the winter at Brighton and were going down to Hurdledale in a week or ten days. Rachel's presence seemed at first any thing but acceptable to Lady Georgiana—every thing that was unexpected was to her suspicious, she asked many questions about Carrie Martin, her condition and pursuits, but appeared satisfied with the answers given, and wound up her interrogation by saying she knew Mrs. Lupton's lodgings were popular; for she was a very careful, attentive person.

"We have the highest confidence in her skill and kindness," she went on: "there is nobody Oliver likes to have about him so well as Mrs. Lupton when he has his worst attacks; and I greatly fear there is one lying in wait for him now. She was my nurse at that distressing time when Sir Laurence's poor little daughter died."

"Your nurse was she?" said Rachel, vaguely; and the few trivial sounding words set her musing. Lady Georgiana asked her what she was thinking of. "Nothing—I was not thinking—only Mrs. Lupton has a disagreeable face."

Lady Georgiana laughed at this and said Rachel was fanciful—the nurse was a very worthy creature, and the subject was permitted to drop.

On the following day Oliver Warleigh was taken ill as his wife had foreseen would be the case; his usual medical attendant, one Doctor Frith, was sent for and the whole house was disorganized. Something very grave seemed to be impending. Before the four-and-twenty hours were over Lady Georgiana looked terribly worn and haggard. She sought Rachel Withers' society, and made her the recipient of her trials and troubles.

"It is very wearing this frequent illness of Oliver's; I never know when I have him safe," said she pathetically. "I often think it would be best for us to settle permanently abroad; constant change is necessary to keep him in spirits, and that is more easily attainable there than here. You are going for a little tour with your friend Miss Martin, are you not? Shall you see them in Hurdledale first?"

Rachel thought not; she proposed paying a visit to the rectory later in the year—in August or September.

"That is the pleasantest time on the moors," said Lady Georgiana. "I dislike the Hurdlemere House myself, but Oliver has a strange hankering after it, as persons afflicted as he is often have for the places and people that, when in health and vigor they sought most to avoid. Mortimer is a dear good son to us; but for his promise to accompany us, I should hardly have courage to go. Once there, it will be for the whole long summer I am afraid. But we must spare my boy for one little holiday."

Mortimer was, indeed, a kindly, gentle, tender-hearted fellow; there was something about him that it was impossible to help loving. At the first private opportunity, he asked Rachel how and where were all her Brookfall friends. She told him they were all well, and that they had just returned to Paris after wintering in Italy. She was not sure whither they were going next—whether to Switzerland or Germany. It was too early in the spring yet for Switzerland, Mortimer replied, but he wished he were on the wing thither; then added that it would be impossible for him to leave his mother while she was in so much anxiety about his father.

He looked anxious too, and when Rachel inquired if the present attack were serious, he said, "Yes, very serious, and I do not think my father will ever be himself again until he has very different people about him. Mrs. Lupton may be a good nurse but she is distractingly watchful—Mr. Gilsland is not here or he would certainly have followed in Dr. Frith's wake. He has been obliged to betake himself to some hiding place abroad to secure himself from his creditors, and it is lucky for us he has. Then, as for Dr. Frith, I do not believe in him at all—I think he as often brings on the paroxysms as he alleviates them. He is a quackish little upstart with a German degree, but my mother is ready to swear by his skill. He can have no regular practice, for go where we may, he is always within hail. My mother is slavishly deferential to him, as women are to the physician who they fancy holds in his hands the power of life and death; but if I had a voice in the matter he would be immediately deposed in favor of some man of reputation; for that he is perfectly helpless in such a difficult and complicated case as my father's, I have long been assured."

Rachel hereupon became rather curious to see

this Dr. Frith, and to know who and what he was that Lady Georgiana should persist in trusting him when no one could perceive any beneficial results from his attendance on her husband. She had slightly sprained her wrist a few days before leaving home, and domestic remedies had failed to reduce the swelling, so she made this an excuse for having him sent in to her the next time he came to the house; though Carrie mockingly said she could prescribe for her quite as well, and she should be glad of the fee.

When he came he proved to be a mean-visaged, pompous, shabby person, as unlike a family physician as possible. His surgical knowledge was trifling, but he used tremendously long words to make a show of more, though it needed but small discernment to set him down as a very ignorant and disreputable member of the profession he had usurped. Seen casually, he appeared an elderly man, but when Rachel came to talk with him over her maimed limb, she perceived that he could not be above forty, and that his grizzled hair was neither more nor less than a wig, and that his green spectacles were certainly worn either for purposes of disguise or for show of respectability, rather than for any use they could be of to the lynx-like eyes that glittered behind them.

Carrie Martin sat in her idle-time chair, critically considering him throughout the consultation, and when he was gone she exclaimed, "Rachel, that man is not only quack but rogue! Where can your friends have picked him up? I would not let him prescribe for a sick dog of mine." Rachel said she did not know. "Humph!" returned Carrie, "I should say his practice has been chiefly colonial, and probably carried on at his country's expense. I never saw more legibly knavish characters on any face than on your family physician's, my dear."

The same day an opportunity occurred of introducing Dr. Frith's name before Lady Georgiana, when she spoke at once highly in his favor. There was no one in whom she felt so much confidence, she said, *no one*. Mortimer wished to have a second opinion on his father's case, but she could not insult Dr. Frith by showing such a distrust of his skill. He was, she added, the physician who had been called in at Hastings when Annis and Mortimer lay ill of the scarlet fever. For her own child she might have been satisfied with Mr. Blunt, the surgeon who attended her children on ordinary occasions, but for Sir Laurence's little daughter she had judged it expedient to have other advice. Rachel listened amazed—how could Frith have ever hoodwinked Lady Georgiana into the belief that he was a capable person? she thought. No wonder the child died, with Lupton for her nurse and that ignorant man for her doctor—and in spite of herself Rachel's mind reverted to the old suspicions that had circulated round the event, and which Bittersweet had warned her against seeking to verify.

III.

As soon as Oliver Warleigh was fit to travel he went down to Hurdledale with his wife and son, and Dr. Frith also in attendance. It was the doctor's first appearance at the Hurdlemere House, and it gave rise to much excitement there. Mistress Dobie told Mary Wray amongst

other things that he had terribly violent scenes with his patient, and that Lady Georgiana seemed almost afraid of her life between them.

About a week after their arrival in the north, one morning immediately after breakfast, Lady Georgiana presented herself at the rectory to seek an interview with John Withers, for the purpose of soliciting him to lend her a sum of money which it was any thing but convenient for him at the moment to spare. She begged him on no account to apprise Sir Laurence of her necessities, and vaguely intimated that it was Mortimer who had brought them upon her. John contrived to oblige her, but both he and his wife were greatly perplexed by the excuse she made for her request.

"Mortimer extravagant—I will never believe it!" cried Katherine. "Give him leisure, sunshine, a pencil and a book, and he has enough to satisfy all his desires. Talking to me only yesterday in his indolent, earnest fashion he wished he were his father's younger son that he might live obscurely at ease instead of having to prepare for the responsibilities of wealth."

John replied: "But why should Lady Georgiana blame her son if the blame lies justly elsewhere?"

To this Katherine said she did not know, but that she was certain Mortimer was not the drain that kept his father and mother always poor; and while his defense was still hot in her mind an opportunity occurred of asking the young man himself how it was that they were constantly straitened.

"I can not tell—where the money goes is as much a mystery to me as it is to you, aunt Kate," was his prompt answer. "I never dream of interfering, but I conjecture that Frith is a great tax. It is costly work to carry a doctor about with you, is it not?"

Katherine believed so. She had never yet seen Dr. Frith; Lady Georgiana did not venture to introduce him at the rectory; but John had seen him and drawn certain inferences from his presence at the Hurdlemere House. When Lady Georgiana came down for that money, she looked like a woman with a great dread upon her; he felt that she did not breathe freely under the doctor's incubus, though she professed to repose an entire confidence in him. She told John of her desire to live abroad, mentioning that Frith expressly forbade another removal for his patient. She said also that a nurse was then on her way down from town by his orders, and that the dreary probability was that they should remain in the dale through the summer. Her brother-in-law could only condole with her, deplore Oliver's unhappy condition and wish for her any change she desired.

The same evening the nurse arrived and proved to be Mrs. Lupton. The inferior woman-folk at the Hurdlemere House received her with marked disfavor, and the gossips whispered more shrewdly than ever.

"Mark my words—there's mischief brewing," said Mistress Dobie to another of her cronies. "Such a proud woman as Lady Georgiana does not go down on her knees to the like of that Doctor Frith for no small cause. There's a riddle 'll be unriddled afore long as will astonish some folks more than they reckon on. I can't abide this nurse as is just come; Oliver

wants no nursing, none he; he wants letting alone; it is liker a *jailer* she is than a *nurse*. Bury a secret deep as you will but it'll come up green above ground sune or syne."

It was just at this time that Katherine drove over one brilliant spring day to Whinstane Tower to pay a duty visit to Lady Foulis. She took Sacharissa Tulip with her for company on the drive, and left her to amuse herself in the wilderness gardens while she mounted to the recluses' turret. Lady Foulis had now been bedridden for a year or more, but life was strong in her yet, and her mind retained such a fixed hold of certain ideas that it seemed as if it would never let them go.

From the first news of it she had refused to believe that poor little Annis was dead at Hastings, and had commonly made inquiries after her when Katherine paid her periodical visits; and though each time the same explanation and reminder of the child's death was given in reply to her questions, on the next occasion she repeated them as if she had never heard the story; and thus she did now.

"How is Sir Laurence's daughter, Kate, and where is she?" she asked abruptly in the midst of another subject.

Katherine tried gravely to recall to her memory how she had been repeatedly assured that the child was dead; but she retorted with acrid distinctness,—

"I know I have been repeatedly assured that she is dead, but that does not make it any the more true. Why do you go on believing in lies? Ask Lady Georgiana about her—she ought to be able to tell you. I had a dream of her last night—she is very beautiful and good though she is my namesake. When she comes home, bid Laurence bring her here to me."

Sacharissa Tulip found her mother very silent as they were driving home again. Katherine was thinking. The singular persistence of Lady Foulis in this delusion of little gipsy's being alive haunted her whether she would or no. Could there lurk a great crime under the wretchedness of Oliver and his wife? Many a moment of bewildering doubt and conjecture had gone over her as over others; could the words of that weird woman have been all along the clue to a dangerous fact which no one would accept from her?

That evening being alone with John she told him what had passed at Whinstane Tower, and he no longer slighted Lady Foulis's assertion. Katherine looked at him pale and awe-stricken.

"Are you thinking she *may* be alive, John?" she asked in an almost inaudible whisper.

"The gossips are beginning to say so, Kate; suspicion is budding again, and there are many watchful eyes and ears about the Hurdlemere House," was his answer. "And there is food enough for them in all conscience."

"If she be alive, where is she? she must be almost a woman now," Katherine said.*

"God knows—we do not. We are on the eve of a discovery and we can but wait," replied John. "Moral certainties are vain in such a case, but there is a mighty power in secrets to reveal themselves if we give them time. If there be any iniquitous fraud about the child's alleged death it is fast growing now out into the daylight."

"Oh, John, I pray it may be all a dream!" cried his wife infinitely distressed.

"I am afraid, my Katie, that it will prove a black and shameful truth. Patience and silence."

No fear that she would talk except to him! And thus suspicion reared again its darkling front and for every whisper of its tongue rose a fear and an agony in the breasts of the guilty. Lady Georgiana walked about as much as ever, and greeted the cottagers with her old dignified grace, but she saw that one and another eyed her askance, and that the day of her reckoning with heaven was at hand.

CHAPTER THE FOURTH.

IN RHINELAND.

A work divine,
A blending of all beauties; streams, and dells,
Fruit, foliage, crag, wood, cornfield, mountain, vine.
LORD BYRON.

I.

CARRIE MARTIN loved the town, Rachel Withers loved the country; Carrie loved the stir of the market-place, Rachel the solitude of hills and rivers, therefore it was a bargain before the friends started on their holiday tour that if Rachel staid peaceably in Paris three weeks with her friend, her friend should afterward spend three weeks with her in any district of fine scenery she selected. Rachel chose the Rhine valley, and thitherward they traveled early in June, stopping a night at Strasbourg and then going forward to Heidelberg the next day. Rachel was delighted with the Neckar scenery and proposed remaining there a while. "Just as you like," said Carrie, "one hill of vine-sticks is the same as another to me." And they subsided for a week into an inn close by the bridge; a cleanly, well-served, old-fashioned place where they were made comfortable in a homely way at very moderate charges.

On the further side of the river and about three hundred yards above the bridge, there was a walled-in orchard with a little garden-house abutting on the road, which had the prettiest garlanded window and balcony imaginable. A Virginian creeper twined its thousands of tendrilly sprays up the rustic pillars and waved from the roof in the most frolic and luxuriant of festoons. It was a picture of itself even now while the foliage was all one mass of vivid greenness, but when the finger of autumnal frost touched leaf by leaf into the wondrous crimson that is its dying array, it must have presented such an exquisite bit of form and color as a painter might delight to carry away for a memorial of the lovely valley.

Its beauty and picturesqueness caught Rachel's fancy on the evening of their arrival when they strolled down by the river in the twilight for half an hour, before writing their home dispatches to give notice of their whereabouts. It was solitary when they passed it first, but in returning they saw that it was occupied by a young man and a girl whose heads were drawn together in whispering intimacy and confidence. Carrie, who had as quick an eye for a germ of romance as for any other mystery, immediately suggested "lovers," and the wreathed balcony was forthwith flowered

over with her fantastic speculations concerning the pair. Rachel, believing Carrie very possibly correct in her surmises, dipped her hat as they went by and forbore to look up. Having invested it with so tender an interest, the next evening they looked out from their window to see if the pair were there again, watching the sunset and the moonrise, and speaking low as the fashion of lovers is. They were, but with them was a lady whom Carrie set down at once as elderly and English, for she wore a bonnet that was never constructed save by a provincial milliner of her own country with a sedate, gray-haired single gentlewoman in prospect. Rachel took these particulars on hearsay; she was not long enough sighted to discover them for herself; but her curiosity to know who the strangers were was excited, and the following day the discovery was made to her very great satisfaction.

They were loitering inn-wards weary and thirsty after a long day's wandering on the wooded hills, when just as they were approaching the garden-house of the wall, out came their two young lovers upon the balcony. To glance up was irresistible; to recognize Sinclair Ferrand and Alice was the affair of a moment, and their exclamations of welcome and astonishment were simultaneous with Rachel's own.

"You here, Rachel Withers!" cried Alice, leaning down toward her in eager greeting. "Oh! what a godsend you will be to aunt Delia—somebody new to explode to! Come in, do come in! Sinclair has gone down to open the garden-door!" And there he was already, standing with it wide and looking by several degrees browner and cheerier than he did when he left England in charge of the traveling party eight months before.

It was impossible to resist the temptation of familiar faces so far away from home; therefore tired, dusty, faint, as they were, in they went; through the orchard, across a little lawn strewn with plots of beautiful flowers, and up a shallow flight of stone steps into a pretty room where sat Dr. Ferrand with a book, Miss Flora with her knitting, and Miss Delia with her basket of busy idlenesses, precisely as they might be found sitting any three hundred nights in the year in their own houses at Claymire.

"Eh, what, Rachel Withers dropped from the clouds!" cried the doctor, who was the first to realize her as a fact; and then the two old ladies clasped their hands, kissed her, rejoiced over her, and asked more questions in a breath than she could have answered by morning. As soon as a pause ensued, Carrie Martin was made known to them; then they were told where the two friends were staying; and as no entreaties moved the aunts to release either until the morning, Alice conveyed them up-stairs for a refreshing, and half an hour after they were all assembled at a banquet made as English as possible with excellent strong tea, up-heaped dishes of fragrant Alpine strawberries and delicious bread and butter.

Of course then there was great effusion of chat; and Carrie, by reason of her non-acquaintanceship till now being almost useless for conversational purposes, had leisure to make mental notes on all the party and especially on her charming young lovers. Not much serenity

was to be expected from Miss Delia after the sudden break-up of their family circle, and she made haste to put her guests to the use for which Sunshine had so simply said they would serve. Her tongue went incessantly in praise, in blame, in depreciation, or in pious horror of the strange and wonderful things they had witnessed in their travels. They had been in Heidelberg since the middle of May, thankful to escape out of "heathenish Paris," whence they came last by way of Strasbourg, stopping two nights at the Maison Rouge to rest. This news made an opening amongst generally interesting topics, of which Carrie, who abhorred silence, boldly availed herself, striking in with an opinion that the cathedral of that ancient fortified town was the finest of all the Gothic churches she had yet seen; an opinion which caused both the old ladies to wave the head of most earnest dissent.

"I could not give my thoughts to the edifice," sighed Miss Flora; "for there on his knees was a laboring man, saying his prayers to a recumbent image, and kissing, yes, positively *kissing*, the senseless hands and feet and breast in adoration!"

"And I observed that, stone though it be, it is *worn* with the repetition of that act of worship," added Miss Delia shuddering. "Oh! it is melancholy to reflect on such utter darkness and absence of gospel light! I have not enjoyed one happy Sunday since we left Claymire, but certainly that at poor Strasbourg was the worst."

Sinclair Ferrand rather wickedly suggested that perhaps that might be because there was something wrong about aunt Delia herself—"a lack of sympathy for instance"—but Carrie Martin subsided into silence before the Protestant demonstration; and knowing her taste and her temper, Rachel had reason to be glad she refrained from proclaiming herself something dreadfully heterodox on the spot, for the perverse pleasure of mystifying her new acquaintance. The doctor good-humoredly attempted to discuss the building with her on architectural rather than doctrinal grounds, but Carrie felt she had fallen into dangerous society, where her independence would not be appreciated or respected; and she kept such discreet watch over her words as deprived them of all their usual flavor and piquancy. She had been shuffled about the world through many reverses, and had seen most civilized varieties of men, women, and books, and the result of her experiences had been to make bigotry—or what she supposed to be such—her favorite aversion.

"We spent Christmas in Rome, and a truly penitential season it was to me," said Miss Delia by and by. "The young ones arranged the tour, and we have patiently followed our leaders, though I know we might often economize distance and be less frequently on the road."

Rachel inquired if Sinclair had been with them all the time.

"Oh, no, not one half of it!" cried Alice. "He leaves us planted somewhere and goes off on independent expeditions with only a knapsack and a walking-stick." Sunshine looked as if she too would like to be off on independent expeditions with only a knapsack and a walking-stick; especially when Sinclair observed a minute or two

after that he thought he should be away to Heilbronn on the morrow. And the following morning, he having started before six o'clock on a tramp up the valley as he had said, Alice brought her sunshine to the inn where Rachel and her friend were staying, and spent a lazy day with them out on the hills fern-gathering and wild-flower hunting.

Alice was in her lightest, gayest mood that morning. Blithe as a bee or heedless as a butterfly. She was very fluent of speech also, and had a thousand little adventures of her travels to tell; and Carrie having incautiously availed herself of her firm right arm to help herself up an abrupt steep, was not suffered to relinquish it again, but was obliged to be dependent for the rest of the ramble. Rachel could perceive that her old friend was amused by this peremptory assistance, and that she was endeavoring to draw Alice out several times. But draw her out as she would, there was never word or sentence elicited that could produce so much as a momentary regret. Even when Alice's sense of fun beguiled her into some arch comment on the aunts, she immediately qualified or effaced it by an affectionate ejaculation. She should be quite sorry to go home, she said, though Claymire was pretty in its way—in fact, like every body else of her age and temper, she reveled in change and excitement.

"It is delightful to travel about," cried she, in a glow of enthusiasm. "I always feel as if something new and wonderful were going to happen—it does *not*, but there is the *expectation*. The world has lovely bits in it! The marvel to me is that while our time in it is so short, we content ourselves with seeing the little we do. Auntie Dee protests daily against the weariness of packing up and moving on, and in the most beautiful scenes hears herself with obtrusive resignation—no, I ought not to say that; for she is very patient, really, and it is hard to look gratified when we are expected to enjoy what we don't care about. But I never watch Sinclair setting out as he did to-day, with his knapsack strapped on his back, and his stick in his hand, that I do not think how much more delightful it must be to be a man than a woman, and long to throw my girlishness by and be off too."

"And you would be off too, did not the proprieties and Auntie Dee forbid," said Carrie, laughing.

Once during that day when they were lying down to rest in the shade, Alice with her hat off, her russet brown hair blown about and her cheeks richly flushed, her likeness to the old portrait at Woodlands was marvelous. She was very beautiful and growing lovelier every day; there was a grace and a charm of animation about her that are most rare; but her fascination would not have been half so great had there been no latent power, no passion underlying the sparkling airiness of her sunny-day moods.

"I like your young friend very well in her beaming moments, but I shall not be satisfied unless I see her in a storm," said Carrie when Alice had left them and gone home.

"Most likely she will give you the opportunity if we meet often," was Rachel's quiet reply. "She is never long the same."

Nor was she. If inquiry had been made of Miss Delia she would have borne testimony to her capriciousness with great uncton.

On their first Sunday at Heidelberg, directly after breakfast, Carrie and Rachel went up to the castle, and while seated on the terrace they saw Sinclair Ferrand and Alice walking together alone; their parents and guardians not having chosen to surmount the difficulties of the steps and the hill before going to the English service as they had had courage to do.

"Look at them," said Carrie, "they are unconscious of every body but themselves and each other. Ah! now they have espied us, and are coming this way. Turn your head straight, Rachel, and don't see them; perhaps, then, they will fancy themselves unobserved."

Rachel did as she was bidden and stared resolutely into the air; but there was no double-dealing about Alice or Sinclair, and in a few moments they arrived and in the most disinterested manner, if they *were* lovers, gave the friends the pleasure of their company as long as they remained on the terrace.

In the evening Rachel and Carrie joined the doctor's party by request, and sat all in the pretty garden-house together, with the window open looking on the river. The doctor read them a sermon there, and after it was over they were free to talk and to stroll about the orchard. Alice had dug up in the woods and on the hills a basket of beautiful ferns, which she was proposing to carry away with her on their further travels: "Until," said Sinclair, "they all die at the top, when she will throw the roots away, as she has done a score of times before," and foreseeing but a short life for them under any circumstances, he broke off several of the longest fronds, and put them with a bit of scarlet geranium for a drooping ornament in Alice's hair. Miss Flora said, "It was not right on a Sunday," but beyond that no remark was made, except by Carrie, who telegraphed Rachel a significantly triumphant glance, and afterward declared that none were so blind as those who would not see—herself implied; for Rachel had not quite agreed with her friend that the two were what she said.

"If they love and marry it will be a perfect little idyll, but they have been companions ever since Alice was a baby child of five or six years old, and I am not sure they are more than friends now," said she, humoring Carrie's fancy, but still retaining her own private doubts.

That Sinclair had set his heart on Sunshine she firmly believed; but an incident of that Sunday evening gave her reason to think Sunshine's vagrant dreams floated far away from him. She mentioned Mortimer Warleigh's name in common incidental talk, and a soft, tell-tale rose blushed all over her face in a moment. Alice was a mystery to her about Mortimer; she had seemed attracted by him in one sense and in another quite indifferent. All Rachel's aspirations were for Sinclair—that brave, constant, single-hearted lover whose love was not of one sudden spring's growth but of many years. It did not seem that the aunts had found out his secret yet or that he had told it. Nor did the doctor make any sign. Alice and he went their own way, companions as much as ever, and were still "the children" in the elder folk's eyes.

II.

The next morning Rachel had a letter from Hurtleale, some part of the contents of which she read aloud to Miss Delia Ferrand, who al-

ways liked to hear pleasing news of her friends' friends. Mortimer Warleigh had come abroad to meet his uncle Sir Laurence, with whom he had spent a fortnight in the Tyrol, and they were now both at Munich, entranced among works of art. A little while after she had read these passages from the letter, Rachel saw Alice diligently studying her traveling map, and she suspected it was for the purpose of coaxing Munich into the way home; but when Rachel looked over her shoulder she quietly folded it up, and met her questioning eyes with a perfectly frank ingenuousness. Alice had a true reticence; a power of keeping her thoughts, hopes, fears, feelings to herself, be they where they might; and her gesture conveyed to Rachel an unmistakable intimation that this girl, childlike as she was, had depths of character which were not idly and curiously to be pryed into.

That evening she parted with Carrie and herself on her way with her aunts and the rest to Frankfort. The good-by was only for a little while, however, as they were sure to meet again somewhere in their passage down the Rhine. And they did meet again at St. Goar. Rachel and her traveling companion had come down from Bingen in the broad shining afternoon, and as they walked from the landing-place to the "Lily," they heard a familiar voice exclaim, "Here they are," and looking up saw Sinclair Ferrand in the balcony over the inn-door, and Alice just rushing out at the window to verify his report with her own bright eyes.

"So glad to see you again!" cried she, nodding her head as they stood below; "we came from Rudesheim this morning."

And then they marched up-stairs and found the doctor and the worthy aunts, and were all extremely delighted to meet once more, though it was scarcely a week since had they parted at Heidelberg. There was an interchange of gossip and adventures for half an hour, then a rest; and in the cool of the evening a leisurely stroll by the river with an English tea in the Ferrands' apartments afterward. Miss Delia was, as usual, highly conversational; all the more cheerfully so, perhaps, because she began to see a term to her toilsome pleasure—which she peremptorily insisted on every body understanding had not been a pleasure at all, but rather a prolonged penance.

"We are drawing nearer home I hope every day," said she, late in the evening, when drowsiness was stealing visibly over her. "Oh! yes, I hope so! And truly, truly thankful shall I be when I set foot on English soil once more. I tell the children they will never prevail on me to come abroad again; I have had enough of sight-seeing to last me my lifetime, and it is a matter of sincere congratulation to me that there are no museums, picture-galleries or fine churches to be visited on this part of the Rhine; for I am heartily weary of them. I can put up with the natural beauties, but I do not intend to fatigue myself by making one more excursion until I walk down from Brookfall to the school at Claymire; and, therefore, Sunshine, you need not think to beguile me by putting on your coaxing airs."

"I am almost of your mind, sister," added Miss Flora in her gentler way; "we can not keep pace with young folks now."

The doctor glanced up at them over his spectacles and newspaper, and suggested prayers, wine and water, and bed—a suggestion that was taken in perfectly good part and acted on by both the old ladies; while Alice, whose room was next to Rachel's and Carrie's, came to talk off a little of her superfluous spirits with them before committing herself to rest. All through the evening she had looked a picture of light-heartedness; she was not tired, bless her, the world was far too new to her for that, and besides something had happened. This something was that they had seen Mr. Mortimer Warleigh in the morning—only for a moment when the boat stopped at Bacharach, and not to speak to, but they had exchanged a recognition from the distance, all of them. Alice now communicated this bit of intelligence to Rachel, who thought it rather significant that the incident had not been referred to by any of the party below, though, of course, her interest in him was very well known to all of them.

Rachel had had another letter from Hurtle-dale that day, giving an alarming account of Oliver Warleigh's state of health, and this she now told Alice, expressing some surprise that Mortimer was not hurrying home—supposing always that the bad news had reached him. "Oh, I should think it has not, or he would never delay," replied Alice. "I am sure he would never delay; for he has a good heart." This was the first word Rachel had ever heard her utter in his favor or otherwise. "He has a good heart," said she, and so kissed Rachel and went away quickly, forgetting Carrie, who was listening by the open window to the Echo Serenade.

"Oh, the little barbarian!" cried she, when she became aware of the neglect. "So she is gone. Has she been quarreling with her tawny lover? he looked more or less thundery all the evening."

Rachel had fancied so too, but she had laid the gloom to the encounter with Mortimer Warleigh, and the probability of his turning up at St. Goar on the morrow, rather than to any fault of Sunshine's.

III.

The next morning when Rachel and her companion went down into the long room to breakfast, there at the top of the table by the open window sat Mortimer Warleigh, himself as fresh as the morning, conning his letters, a sheaf of which lay on a plate before him. The sound of their entrance caused him to lift his head, when he immediately sprang up and shook hands with Rachel, expressing the pleasure and surprise that a chance meeting elicits from most persons, not that there was very much *chance* about it, however; for he had learned from his mother that Rachel and the Ferrand party were all to and fro somewhere in Rhineland. Greetings exchanged, Rachel made haste to ask him the latest news from the Hurtle-mere House.

"This letter that I was reading when you came in is from my mother," was his reply, and he turned the document in his hand, glancing down the page as he spoke. After a moment's pause he went on, "My father has taken a sudden turn toward recovery, and she begs me not to hurry home, and to intercept Sir Laurence if I can;

but I do not know where he is just now, for it is a week since we parted; perhaps her own letters may reach him somewhere or else aunt Kate's. I had news from her two days ago at Heidelberg that moderated my anxiety a little, and she wishes me not to cut short my holiday, but I shall make my way home very soon nevertheless."

"Then you have lately come from Heidelberg?" said Rachel. A delicate color suffused his face as he answered, yes—it was a nice old town. Naturally he was asked if he had staid there long. Only one night, he replied, and the ingenuous blush deepened. Mortimer was no actor! If he had been inquired of why he was here now, he would probably have said because his mother had sent him.

Breakfast being now brought in, they seated themselves in a group and prolonged the meal with travelers' talk. Mortimer glanced up hurriedly each time the door opened to see who entered; and good-natured Rachel, knowing well for whom he watched, amiably took occasion to observe by and by that though their friends the Ferrands were at the inn—as perhaps he was aware—they did not come into the public room of a morning, but breakfasted in their own apartments. Just at that moment, as if for the purpose of contradicting her, appeared the doctor, followed by Sinclair and there was a renewal of civilities.

"I see you have tasted the freshness of the morning," said the doctor.

"Yes; I came down by the earliest boat from Bacharach," replied Mortimer.

Sinclair was not disposed to conversation; but his father added cheerfully that if Mortimer Warleigh were remaining at the "Lily," he hoped they should have the pleasure of seeing him again during the day; he then took a newspaper and two letters from the post-box, and left the room, when his son, as if suddenly smitten with the propriety of being more courteous, invited Mortimer to join him by and by in a walk up the beautiful so-called Swiss Valley across the river. The proposal was accepted with the greatest apparent satisfaction, and that being agreed on, Sinclair followed his father, leaving the other three to continue their interrupted chat. It struck Rachel Withers at once that her friend Sinclair had meaning in his maneuver; and so it presently turned out. She had heard no talk of any excursion up the Swiss Valley on the previous evening, and when she paid her morning respects with Carrie to Miss Flora and Miss Delia she found that the arrangement included neither the doctor nor his sisters, nor even Sunshine. Palpably, therefore, Sinclair's object was to carry Mortimer Warleigh out of Alice's way—a deep design, perhaps, if she had not been bent on circumventing it, but as the event proved, in this instance, shallow exceedingly.

Mortimer was with the Ferrands' family party, quite at home and happy, when Rachel and Carrie went in; his hands being at the moment occupied in holding a skein of white lambswool which Miss Delia was busy winding. The doctor had his newspaper, Miss Flora her Bible, and Sinclair his Murray, while Alice with the slightest gathering of cloud on her brow was asking in a voice of reproachful remonstrance, "Why may I not go up the Swiss Valley with them, auntie Dee?"

"Because, my love, you did rather too much the last time you went on an expedition without us, and were quite ill after it," answered Miss Delia with prompt decision.

"I was tired to start then, but I am not tired now—may I go?" persisted the willful damsel in a more urgent tone.

"Your aunt Delia said no, Sunshine," interposed the doctor; and there the discussion would probably have been at an end had not Mortimer put on a comically pathetic face and pleaded for her, "We could carry her between us if her legs fell short;" that expression of legs falling short being Alice's old excuse for not going further than she wished when she was a baby-thing.

Every body laughed but Sinclair and Alice herself, who immediately asked, "Who told you that saying of mine?"

"No one—is it a saying of yours? So it is of my sister Clara's too," replied he. "She uses it still when she fancies herself over-driven; in that we are both indolent alike."

The skein of lambswool was now reeled off, and the holder was at liberty to depart. Sinclair made the first move.

"Come," said he, "the morning is getting on; we had better start." Mortimer glanced round to the spot where a minute before Alice had been standing, but she had disappeared; so without more loitering or ado the two young men went off together.

When Sunshine vanished it was only out upon the balcony, where she ensconced herself to watch the boat that would carry Sinclair and Mortimer across the river. Miss Delia being in some displeasure with her for her persistence obtusely refrained from noticing her; but Carrie Martin, whose beguiling tones would sometimes almost melt the hardness out of a flint, addressed herself to the task of comforter; but not, as it proved, with her usual success. Alice fretted and fumed under her taming—or teasing—artifices, and finally escaped them on pretense of writing a letter, which she left unfinished that she might mend a glove, in its turn dropped that she might seek the doctor who had quitted the room soon after his son; and thus it came to pass that they all lost sight of her for several hours; that they sought her in the house and round the house and could find her nowhere. When they saw her next it was positively with Sinclair and Mortimer, coming up from the landing-place for the boats; and her guilty, half-defiant expression of countenance betrayed in a moment that the willful young thing had had her own way in spite of her aunts and the doctor.

"Where have you been all this while, Alice? we have felt quite uneasy about you," Miss Delia said suspiciously as she appeared.

"It is all right, aunt Delia—she has been with us," replied Sinclair, in a tone meant to cut discussion short.

"We espied her wandering disconsolate by the river and turned back for her," added Mortimer. "We hope to be forgiven our disobedience this time; she is not over-fatigued, as you may see."

No, she did not look over-fatigued, nor yet, though she had had her walk up the valley, did she look perfectly happy after it. Miss Delia would have felt herself neglecting a duty had

she not delivered herself of a rebuke or two, and this, being really vexed, she did with so much coldness, that poor Alice never spoke once during dinner and ate like a mere sparrow, grieving her aunts more and more. And when evening came she had what Miss Delia called one of her *moods*.

The women folk had returned to the saloon after dinner, leaving the three gentlemen to their conversation and pipes below, when Alice went out into the balcony by herself and there remained, silent and solitary. Miss Flora suggested that she should be let alone, whispering that the low fit would have its time; and then they fell to talking of other things and almost forgot her until the Echo Serenade drew them out into the twilight to listen. She had gathered herself up into a corner of the balcony and took no notice of any of them until Rachel, thinking to rouse her, put an arm round her shoulders, and made some indifferent remark on the soft beauty of the evening. Alice was leaning her face downward, and suddenly by the falling of a scalding drop on her hand which rested before her on the balustrade, Rachel found out that she was crying—and tears from Alice were a most rare and singular effusion.

"Don't, don't," she sobbed, and turned so determinedly away from any attempt at consolation that Rachel judged it expedient to follow Miss Flora's advice, and let her alone in her *mood*. Soon after she left her retreat, and kissing her aunts told them she was going to bed. No remonstrance was raised; only Miss Flora said, "Yes, my darling; you have over-exerted yourself to-day, and a long sleep will do you good," but as soon as she disappeared the tender-hearted old lady added with a sigh: "I should not be surprised if that child cried through half the night."

"What began it? Did any body speak to her beside myself? She never frets for *my* scoldings," said Miss Delia visibly aggrieved. "What can it be that brings on these extraordinary paroxysms of distress?"

"It is of no use to speculate," responded Miss Flora. "It is a mystery of nature, but I did hope they were over and done with now. Mr. Wilson used to assure us she would grow out of her delusions, but they are more fixed than ever!"

"She is an interesting study," here observed Carrie Martin, "there is a very strange look in her eyes at certain moments."

"What do you mean, my dear? We have seen nothing peculiar in them unless it be their beauty," said Miss Flora with an animation bordering on affront.

Carrie made haste to explain.

"They are beautiful eyes," answered she; "very beautiful—dreamy and loving one moment and all caprice and sparkle the next. But the expression I mean never struck me so forcibly in any face as it does now and then in hers—it is the puzzled, painful, far-away, *seeking* gaze of some one striving vainly to remember."

"She is full of fancies, poor pet; full of unaccountable fancies," said Miss Flora sympathetically; "but we always entreat that they may not be commented on to herself. We attach as little importance to them as possible ourselves; for we find they vanish soonest when

not reasoned upon. She will be herself again to-morrow."

This closed the conversation; for the doctor and Sinclair appearing, they inquired for Alice, and being told that she was gone tired to bed, prayers were read, and the rest followed her example. Carrie Martin, with her knowledge of psychology and her habits of shrewd observation, had, however, laid her hand upon a fact. There was a chord in Sunshine's memory that had begun, after long silence, to vibrate anew, as she felt darkly along it to discover by what it hung. Unconsciously even to herself, it hung by Mortimer Warleigh, and a chance word from him would set it painfully thrilling. As her heart grew and ripened, the thought of her father in the core of it became more real and living to her than ever; and she had no one—*no one* to whom she might utter it! Even Sinclair, dear Sinclair, who loved the very ground she walked on, and set a value even on her shoe-tie, rallied her over *that*, and tried to laugh her out of it as a delusion. For all her seeming joy and happiness there was often a heavy ground-swell of sorrow and unsatisfied yearning below the sunny flow of the deep waters; and notwithstanding all discouragements both from within and from without, her faith never wavered. She held her peace, but when she appeared most to have forgotten, perhaps then she remembered the best.

The next day she was very quiet and silent after her mood of passionate gloom; she looked tired, restless, uneasy; but it was safest to leave her to herself, those said who knew her best; if she spoke at all it would be to Sinclair, and of her own accord; but for the present she seemed intent on nothing so much as on the avoidance of every body—Sinclair not excepted. Miss Delia had a conversation with Rachel Withers about her *protégée* during that morning's walk, which interested her exceedingly. She had never before heard any particulars of the poor child's recovery from that illness, brought on by cruelty, cold, and exposure which ensued on her adoption into the household at Brookfall; for it was not a subject that her benefactresses were fond of reviving. Indeed Miss Delia now confessed that it had been their endeavor from the first to obliterate all traces of a painful past from the child's memory. She was discouraged from speaking of the period before she escaped from Welsbeck, or of any former recollections at all; and as a very young memory is not tenacious of *names*, or of any thing but what may be styled picture-events, most of what had befallen her before she was put into the charge, of Mr. Gilsland and his wife was undoubtedly lost. But one fixed idea, Miss Delia acknowledged, she had retained for years; indeed, she was sure that in her secret heart she had not relinquished it even yet; and this was that her father, for whom she was in mourning when Sinclair found her on the down and brought her to Brookfall, was not dead.

"It was for her obstinate persistence in this denial that Mrs. Gilsland had beaten her," Miss Delia said, as she told her tale. "It is a long while ago, and many things begin to slip my memory; but my strong impression is that the poor little innocent was ill-used for asserting that her dear papa was alive, in spite of all Mr.

Gilsland's solemn assurances to the contrary. Sunshine's ways were no doubt very provoking, but it was not a very sagacious means they adopted to drive out her belief; for it ended by stamping it on her heart indelibly. Years after when Flora and I were speaking to her of God and the future life, reminding her of her dear father and mother gone before her to heaven, we were deeply grieved to hear her murmuring to herself, "All the same, papa is *not* dead;" though she never openly braved us with the assertion as she did the Gilslands. When she has her moods now it is that idea, I am persuaded, that is at the foundation of them; and most distressing it is; for such a strong and steady delusion amounts almost to monomania; and for all we can see, it increases upon her."

"It never occurred to you, did it, Miss Delia, that Alice might have right and reason for what she believed?" said Rachel, on the inspiration of the moment. Miss Delia looked at her as if she thought she too might have taken leave of her senses.

"My dear Rachel, I did not expect to hear such an absurd question from you," was her reply. "Of course it never did. How should it? I do not read romances to pervert my judgment of facts. I take all things for what they are."

Rachel held her peace; and felt almost ashamed of her suggestion.

IV.

The next day there was arranged an exploring party over the hills beyond the Castle, including every body but Miss Delia, who kept to her word of going on no more excursions, and was apparently quite satisfied to be left in the company of her knitting, her miscellaneous work-basket, and her good book. The party was provided with a baggage donkey to carry the luncheon, and with two supernumeraries for any body to mount who might fall tired by the way—Miss Flora and Carrie Martin implied; but even they started on foot like the rest.

In the golden prime of the morning they set out. It was the beginning of one of those days when old folks feel young again, and young ones ought to doubt whether there be any pain, grief, misery, wickedness in a world so fair. The gossamer sparkled on the low bushes, and the dew in the shady nooks about them, while overhead the sky shone, one calm, cloudless expanse of blue. And withal there was a stir in the air as of innumerable wings—wings of zephyrs that cooled deliciously the rosy cheek of Midsummer, which but for their gentle fanning must have blazed in a sultry languor of blushes ere noon.

Alice was not quite sunny, but it was clearer weather with her than it had been for two days past. She quietly possessed herself of Sinclair's arm, and Mortimer Warleigh joined them, with or without a welcome. Then the doctor lent his sister his aid in mounting the hill, while Carrie and Rachel strolled after; the donkeys bringing up the rear.

"You may think what you like, Rachel," suddenly began her companion as they followed some twenty paces behind Alice and her two friends; "but that child and Sinclair Ferrand

are profoundly and inseparably attached to each other. Look how unconsciously she applies to him, now she has come to herself again, as if she had gotten to her rest. You fancy she has a budding tenderness for that beautiful young Warleigh, and there is a strain of caprice in her manner that might mislead him too, but it does not mean *love*. I should be angry with her if she could prefer him to her tawny lion—he is a noble fellow."

"Well," replied Rachel, long since unsettled in her opinions by Carrie's persistence; "I wish you may be right. Sinclair has served for her these twelve years, and there is no question as to which would love her most constantly."

"Nor which is best worth loving. He has a poetical, gentle character, that Mortimer, but he has no courage, no fortitude to boast of. He dreams of his wishes,—for they are too weak to be called desires, and too indistinct to be called hopes,—and in a little while they fade out before him like roseate reflections of clouds in water. Let him be ever so rich—and I by no means despise rank and wealth—it would not be a white day for Alice if she won him. What is it that haunts her imagination and makes her always of such an uncertain and divided mind, Rachel?"

The question came upon Rachel too unexpectedly to be fenced off with skill; Alice's delusions were not explained by her benefactresses to indifferent persons, and Rachel knew that they preferred them to be as little known as possible; so she hesitated, stammered and ended by evading the inquiry with a pretense that she did not know what Carrie meant. Carrie saw through her feeble fiction and immediately added: "Oh, never mind; I had no right to ask. But it is so much my habit to observe that I can not for the life of me help seeing how, beyond and above all daily pleasures and pains, the child has some vision that holds her in a capricious bondage. Her heart is half its time pondering over a mystery, dim and hard to interpret. She has a secret hope and expectancy; and often when no one is watching her, and she seems idly dreaming in the sun or reveling in the sweet air, she is looking and straining out to catch this film of fancy—or it may be of fact—which floats always just beyond her reach."

"It never occurred to me that you were a witch before, Carrie!" exclaimed Rachel laughing, but surprised at her penetration.

"Witch, nonsense!" repeated Carrie. "I can add this and that together. I have heard the story of her adoption at Brookfall from Mary Cornwell, and it is my opinion and always was that she is no more akin to Mr. Gilsland than you are. Mary thought so too. You see, Rachel, I am not afraid of speaking out."

"Pray, don't speak out to any body else!" cried Rachel. "It would do far more harm than good; if you *will* have it,—that is Alice's own delusion. But no one regards it besides. Do be discreet, Carrie, and hold your peace here."

"So be it; let us talk of something else," rejoined her companion; and sheering off from personal matters altogether, she began to speak of a new German novel she was reading. But what she had said before sank into Rachel's mind.

They were walking along a winding road betwixt open fields that waved luxuriant with corn; the flower was off the wheat, the ears were full, and the sun had given them the first pale tinge that a few weeks would enrich to a deep golden brown. It was a wide expanse, with hills of dun violet hue in the distance: a lovely scene at any season, but at this the loveliest. On the right the fields were fringed with wood growing up a steep; and as they went farther, the road bending toward it, they looked down upon a sweet curve of a narrow secluded valley. Round and round whirled a great mill-wheel in the dazzling sunlight below, the diamond spray flying from it in showers, and the whirr, whirr, floating up to where they stood with a softened, pastoral rhythm.

"If we could get down into that valley!" suggested Mortimer Warleigh, smitten by its peaceful charm.

That did not seem impossible. Indeed, twice since they set out on their wanderings they had observed cart-roads across the fields to the wood, which no doubt led down into the glen if followed far enough; so they went on and on; sometimes leaning away from it as the road lent, then wending back to it again, until they reached a farm and a green meadow dotted with trees—the advance-guard of a thick copse that extended before them with the highway running through it. Oh! the cool shadow and pleasantness of it when they struck in under the dense foliage; and the donkeys being tethered with enough grazing freedom, they all sat down in a group to rest.

"City life for those who like it, but give me liberty and sylvan delights!" exclaimed Mortimer Warleigh, and stretched himself at ease under a spreading tree.

Opposite to him was Alice leaning against a mossy hillock, her hat in her lap, and her waved brown hair uncovered. Rachel could not help watching her and meditating on Carrie Martin's strange suggestions. She was not talkatively inclined, and to judge from the perplexed gravity of her face, before they had been seated five minutes she was sunk in a deep reverie! her mind going step by step through some slow process of thought. This mood was better than her passionate one, but it was not quite the most suitable mood in which to go a-gipsying.

"Wake up, Alice," cried the doctor once in his stirring tones, but though her eyes did lift themselves vaguely for a moment they were immediately down on the grass again and veiled in mute meditation. Miss Flora intimated that she was not to be teased, and for the next half-hour she might have been asleep for any sign of wakefulness she showed; though the doctor, Mortimer, Carrie and the rest got into an animated talk about pastoral poets and poets in general, which at another time would have been silvered with her liveliest prattle; for Sunshine had a very pretty taste in poetry and in all works of imagination and fancy.

When they struck their teuts to journey on, Miss Flora and Carrie after a few modest excuses, availed themselves of the donkeys that had followed in their train with a view to their falling tired by the way; and Alice slid her hand under Rachel's arm, whispering her to come on in advance, which she submissively did, all un-

witting of the entertainment preparing for her. When they had gained about a couple of hundred yards before the rest of the party Alice said without the slightest circumlocution,

"Don't talk to me, Rachel. I want to *think*."

"You have hurried me out of breath, so that I could not talk if I would," rejoined Rachel, shortly. Alice thereupon gave her a little rallying shake to restore her and slackened her pace, falling presently into such a lazy lounge that all the party were enabled to repossess them.

"Don't be left behind," said the doctor, admonishing them as he went by last with Carrie Martin and his son. Rachel bade him not be anxious, promising to keep them in sight, but inly wishing Alice's vagaries were less obnoxious to remark. She had not a word for her as they loitered on; her mouth shut, her brow knit. With her alpenstock which she carried rather unnecessarily here, she apparently marked off the different stages of her reflections, striking it on the ground now and then with sudden emphasis. Once or twice she sighed, threw back her head, and inhaled a long breath like a person thoroughly wearied, bewildered, and perplexed. Then Rachel ventured to ask her what she was thinking about, but she was only bidden to be quiet for reply; and this went on for a mile or more, when they saw Sinclair waiting in the distance to be their guide through the wood into the valley; the rest having already disappeared down a rough, narrow track which would just allow the donkeys to pass and that hardly. It was a very stony road, needing all their caution and occasionally Sinclair's assistance, so that by and by Alice was shaken out of her silent fit and reduced to the proper use of her tongue. The first laugh she indulged in broke the spell completely; and at length, when down by the pathway came tinkling the merry little brook of the valley, her sunshine burst out, and she began to sing with all her heart in her voice some stanzas of Tennyson's beautiful song,—

1.

I come from bannts of coot and hern,
I make a sudden sally,
And sparkle out among the fern,
To bicker down a valley.

2.

I chatter over stony ways
In little sharps and trebles,
I bubble into eddying bays,
I babble on the pebbles.

3.

I murmur under moon and stars
In brambly wildernesses;
I linger by my shingly bars,
I loiter round my cresses.

4.

And in and out I curve and flow,
To join the brimming river,
For men may come and men may go,
But I go on for ever.

And so was herself again and more blithe and bonnie than she had been since the first evening at St. Goar. She seemed just to have flung the cloud behind her by an effort of will; she was strong and sound-hearted enough to cast off gloom when it would not come clear; and however perversely fate might turn and twist her fortunes, she would still have a fortune left in a healthy, happy nature. Sinclair now staid

with her and Rachel, and they hastened or lingered just as it pleased them. By and by Alice linked her hand in his arm, and so they went on until they emerged into the farm-yard of one of the mills. Crossing this, and a little intervening meadow, they came out into the road that ran through the glen, and saw their party traveling leisurely forward in front. Before they could overtake them a halt was called; Miss Flora and Carrie dismounted, and with Mortimer's assistance passed the brook on stepping-stones to take refuge on a charming little knoll at the edge of the copse, which crept all the way up the hill on that side of the valley. And here luncheon was spread.

The moment Alice and her companions rejoined the others, Miss Flora saw that her Sunshine was her brightest self again, and calling the dear child to sit beside her she made pretense of fastening her collar, smoothing her hair, and by other unobtrusively tender demonstrations intimated to her capricious darling the satisfaction she felt in the change. Her gloom being gone, she became the pleasantness of the afternoon to every body. It was marvelous what a difference her altered mood made in the general effect of the day's enjoyment. If she had been grave to the end, most of the party would have gone back to their inn feeling that they had had but a dull time of it.

Luncheon was gone through with lazy enjoyment; then Mortimer Warleigh brought out his wandering sketch-book, and would draw all his friends in their attitudes of ease; but the most picturesque part of the group turned out to be the donkey-boys, regaling on the fragments of the feast, with their donkeys picketed beside them. Next the doctor told an adventure of his travels in Germany when he made the grand tour as a young man, and traveling was not so easy as it is nowadays; and finally Alice and Carrie sang a duet—such sweet singing as astonished the miller and his men, and brought them out into the blazing sun to listen. They let the time slip by now as idly as it would, for they were within two miles of their inn; and without a single adverse incident to mar the pleasure of the day, they reached it at dusk, to find Miss Delia waiting with a heavy German tea in preparation, and the fairies helping her at her knitting, for her needles were still briskly click, clicking, though it was impossible she could see.

v.

On the following day there was a second separation amongst the travelers. Mortimer Warleigh went down to Bonn to stay with his brother Roderick; Dr. Ferrand and his party proceeded to Coblenz; and Rachel and Carrie Martin remained on at St. Goar, awaiting the arrival of expected letters. But there was a general understanding that they should all meet again at Remagen in three or four days if nothing unforeseen occurred to prevent it.

The Ferrands were the first to arrive there, and as they walked up from the landing-place—a thoroughly happy-looking group of pleasant English gentlefolks—a solitary man who was sitting with no other company than his pipe in the garden of the inn overlooking the river watched them with the lazy sort of interest that a Briton abroad commonly feels in his fellow-

country people. The season was not fully begun and the rush of Rhine tourists had not yet set in, so that this family party had a peculiar attraction. Sir Laurence Warleigh—for he it was—had had his inn to himself for a day and a night, but these travelers were clearly making for its hospitable shelter, as he saw from the man in attendance on their baggage. As they passed below the garden trellis he endeavored to interpret their relationship; the father and son were easy to label, but neither of the aunts looked at all like mamma, and the stately, bright-visaged girl, whose russet brown hair had escaped from its net and the shelter of her hat, and was streaming down her back in luxuriant negligence, was evidently not of their kith and kin.

Miss Delia was marching on independently in front—there was briskness in the old lady's step yet, notwithstanding her sixty years; Miss Flora had possession of the doctor's arm, and Alice and Sinclair were bringing up the rear; he with a plaid flung over his shoulder and she with another. The solitary observant man heard her voice speaking as she went by, and something in the tone of it and in her air reminded him indefinitely of his lost Helena. He stood up and leant forward to look after her as she vanished round the corner of the house to where was the entrance, and then fell into a long dream of his darling and his poor little wildling as the smoke of his pipe curled up in the blue summer air.

He had found a letter at Mayence yesterday arresting his hurried journey homeward on his brother Oliver's account, and his previous plan of travel having been broken by the hasty summons that had brought him thus far on his way to England, he had come on to Remagen, which he had liked on a former occasion when he staid there during his earliest wanderings of all, while Sir William Warleigh was still living and he was an exile from home and friends. Hardly more an exile than he was now, however, for his life was for the most part lonely. He was staying at the drowsy little village speculating on the chance of being rejoined by Mortimer, who had gone away from him in some haste while they were at Munich. His nephew and he had unfortunately few tastes or pursuits in common, and Mortimer had no notion of exerting himself to cultivate such as pleased his uncle. When he became weary Sir Laurence let him go without remonstrance or complaint, though the lad's company was pleasant to him. He had tried to attach Mortimer to himself by every act of generous kindness, but had failed—failed, that is, for all practical purposes. Theoretically the young man loved, admired, respected Sir Laurence, but he could not live with him for longer than a week at a time without feeling the strain on his powers of exertion intolerable. That evening Sir Laurence had the great room of the inn quite to himself; the new comers did not enter it, but esconced themselves in a little salon adjoining, where was a piano, on which in the twilight Alice played some soft, low, reverie music. He went out into the balcony for his smoke and listened till it ceased; and when the dark was falling out came the young man of the party and the sunny-faced girl with him, and stood not far off whispering

together. Sir Laurence said to himself as Carrie Martin had said on a former similar occasion, "Lovers," and carried his pipe away to a bench in the garden. But all that night and till long past the midnight, thoughts of Helena and Annis haunted him as they had not done for years; and on the morrow, to get away from melancholy, he took the first boat on to Cologne, and the strange fate that had brought him within reach of his wildling for a few hours drifted them asunder again as far as ever.

The same afternoon Rachel Withers and her traveling companion arrived at Remagen to find that all their friends were just gone out for a drive; but in a couple of hours' time they returned, refreshed and unfatigued by what Miss Delia announced as the most charming little *outing* she had enjoyed since they had entered the Rhineland. It had been a long, straight drive by the river.

But Rachel Withers was tired and out of sorts. Carrie Martin had been speculating all round the mystery of Alice's delusions as they came down the river from St. Goar, and an inexplicable weight and oppression had descended on Rachel's mind in consequence. She felt a vague presentiment that something was going to happen. She tried to think there must be thunder in the air and said so, but her manner was nervous and absent.

"You are not looking your best, Rachel; what ails you?" were Miss Delia's observant words as they exchanged greetings, warning her to put off whatever traces of perplexing thought overshadowed her countenance. The ready and in this instance genuine plea of a slight headache checked further remarks, and the old lady having prescribed a cup of strong tea and the amusement of light gossip after it, hustled Rachel before her into the little salon. Here Sunshine came to her blithe as a bird, asking if she had nothing to say to *her*, and protesting that she had not so much as given her a kiss or wished her good-day. These omissions were speedily rectified, but the charge was just—Rachel had Alice so much in her mind that she had overlooked her actual presence.

"And you have had bad news—you are worried," then said Alice, holding Rachel's face between her two soft hands, and peering at her with a kindly scrutiny.

"I have had no news good, bad or indifferent," was the answer. "I ought to have had a letter from John or from Katherine this morning, but there was no letter at all."

"Let Rachel alone, Alice; is nobody to be allowed a mood but yourself?" cried Miss Delia. "Come, my dear, and have a cup of tea—the best remedy in the world for a headache. Open the window, Sinclair, and let us enjoy as much as we can of the river breezes. The evening is very sultry."

And then they gathered round the table, a group of perfectly commonplace people, and talked over their cups the commonplace talk of holiday-travelers, till the urn had ceased to hiss, and the evening sunshine faded into purple reflections on the hills beyond the river; till the moon rose silvering the long ripples, and the last steamboat dropped a single passenger and went by on its way to Cologne.

This one passenger turned out to be Mortimer

Warleigh. When Miss Delia and Miss Flora resigned themselves into easy chairs after tea and the doctor imitated their laudible example, Alice and Carrie had begun to sing duets: then Sinclair, whose base was magnificent, joined them in a glee, until the music brought a furtive group of listeners out upon the balcony and under it in the road—Mortimer amongst them. He took the privilege of a friend abroad, and looking in at the open window he asked how every body did and if he might join them; and permission being granted, as a matter of course, he entered the salon and was one with them for the rest of the evening. He had been there but a few minutes when there came a knock at the door and the landlord presented himself with the official volume in which all persons resting a night at an inn must inscribe their names. Before writing his own, Mortimer glanced up the page at those already there, and notified his discovery of his uncle's by exclaiming, "Oh! Rachel Withers, Sir Laurence was here last night—did you see him?"

"No; we only arrived at Remagen this afternoon," was Rachel's reply.

Mortimer then questioned the landlord as to Sir Laurence's coming and going, and being told that his destination was Cologne, he wrote a few lines for which a messenger was to be found swifter than the post, who would seek him at the most likely hotels and give him the letter, unless he had gone on his way and was already out of reach.

It was a pity and very singular, Miss Delia observed, condoling with the young man, that Sir Laurence Warleigh should have passed his nephew on his homeward road without meeting, when a meeting would have been so pleasant. She had often been struck, she said, by the strange, hair's-breadth disappointments that people encounter in this world; doubtless there was a providential design in them, though to the weak in faith they seemed so useless and contradictory. She went on in her moral strain a long while, nobody listening very attentively to her platitudes except Rachel, who always lent her ears good-naturedly to a neglected speaker; but how much more would the good old lady have marveled at the inscrutable complexity of human affairs could she have known who had been within sight and speech of Alice last night, and had gone on his unconscious way this morning!

When Mortimer Warleigh joined the party the music had given place to conversation, and on lights being brought in presently, Rachel noticed that Alice shrunk into the shade and bent her face low over a book. Just then Miss Flora gently terminated her sister's sermonette by saying,

"I think you once told us, Rachel, that Sir Laurence Warleigh married a Miss Gwynne, did you not? I knew a Mrs. Gwynne slightly some years ago."

"Yes, she was a young Roman Catholic lady, an orphan; she lived with her grandmother at a place called Everham in Surrey, before her marriage," replied Rachel.

When Miss Flora asked her simple question Alice started, and now intense listening was expressed in every line of her face.

"Ah, then she must have been Helena—

our old friend's grandchild!" cried Miss Delia. "Mrs. Gwynne was one of the Talboys of Dorsetshire—she was a *strong* Papist, but a good woman in her way."

"Sir Laurence's young wife was called Helena; she was a beautiful creature—I knew and loved her dearly," said Rachel.

"And her father would be James Gwynne—he was in the Navy," went on Miss Delia. "He was the last of the Surrey branch; there are two or three Gwynnes left in Dorsetshire, but the family is dwindling out." And this information the genealogical old lady followed up with a long prose on the antiquity and dignity of the race which had twice intermarried with the Ferrands.

"Sir Laurence's wife was not kindly received amongst his friends; indeed, I believe they never acknowledged her at all," interposed Mortimer. "Old Mrs. Damer Warleigh of Bristowe stood her friend, but the rest neglected her. It was a cruel shame; why should a man not marry to please himself? However, she died very soon, and then they were sorry. My uncle Laurence loves her memory to this day. They had one child, a little girl, whom I can just remember; a passionate, wild little creature, who was sent to my mother to be taken care of. We both had the scarlet fever together at Hastings, and she died."

At this instant Rachel Withers happened to look toward Alice, who was watching the speaker with intent wide-open eyes; her lips dumb but breathless and apart, as if her heart were panting in an agony of vehement, suppressed emotion. Carrie Martin also was observing her; observing her with the keen scrutiny of a person bent on following a secret into its remotest ramifications for the pure love of a romantic mystery.

"Family disunion is very much to be deplored," said Miss Delia; "but it is not often repented of until repentance is too late."

"Nearly eleven o'clock, Alice!" here cried the doctor, nipping his sister's fresh preaching in the bud. "All out, eleven o'clock, I declare!" appealing to his watch. "Time for early birds to be gone to roost when there is a long flight before them in the morning."

"Time for all of us," said Miss Flora; "I had no idea it was so late." And ten minutes after good-nights were said and all had dispersed to their several apartments.

On the stairs Alice kissed Rachel, who could not but feel how cold was her face and how tremulous her lips. The poor excited girl would fain have continued with her the subject that had been cut short below, but Rachel was weary, she did not know what was impending, and she longed for peace and seclusion in her own room. She left Alice at her door, therefore, and wishing her happy dreams with a feigned carelessness, passed forward and left her standing outside with a wistful disappointment in her eyes as she watched her disappear. Rachel was angry with herself for her coldness, and leisurely undressing she had time to think the matter over and to reflect on the probable complexion of those happy dreams she had wished the child; and tingling with self-reproach she at length determined to go to her, though with what intention she had no distinct idea.

Not receiving any answer to her first cautious knock, she turned the handle of the door; it yielded and she went in, calling softly, "Alice, Alice, where are you?" for she did not see her, her candle being out, and only the moonlight shining into the room. She was not in bed nor made ready for it; she was kneeling on the floor near the window, weeping convulsively, and when Rachel put her arm round her to lift her up, her whole frame was quivering and shaken by the violence of her sobs. "Alice, darling, what is it? what ails you?" she asked entreatingly. But Alice would give her no answer then except, "Let me be—leave me; I want to be by myself," though she grew calmer by and by when she found Rachel persisted in not leaving her until she was safe on her pillow. That alleviated she would have made haste to be gone, but Alice would not then suffer her to escape so easily.

"Rachel, you know what troubles me, I see you do," said she, with earnest lips. "Don't tell me like all the rest of the world that I am under delusions—they are *not* delusions. They are more real and more precious to me than all on earth beside, except one thing and that is dear Sinclair's love."

"I will not tell you they are delusions, Alice, for I begin to think there must be something in them," responded Rachel.

"*You do!* Oh, bless you, Rachel, for those good words!" and Alice gave her an energetic embrace, and fell to weeping in an ecstasy. Poor Rachel, sober by nature, and long set by habit in calm, quiet ways, was terribly puzzled and perplexed by the outbursts of more passionate characters. She could only sit by watching and wondering and wishing they were over, as she did now, until Alice with a sigh as drawn up from the very depths of her soul, sobbed out, "I can be patient now—I only wish it were Sinclair who believed instead of you. May I tell him what you have said?" From you it will come like words of truth and soberness—me he laughs at even *now*. Oh, Rachel, how you have gladdened my heart!"

"Darling, what have I done?" asked Rachel, half frightened at the effect of her unconsidered words. "I can not help you—perhaps I am only one goose the more for saying what I have said. If there be any thing secret it will come out in the end. Let me say good-night, now; if you want any more talk about it, stay till to-morrow."

"But I may tell Sinclair; I *must*—I always do," urged Alice, still detaining her.

"Very well, and he will laugh at me too, no doubt—perhaps, even, he will be displeased. I can not help it if he be, it has been creeping into my mind for some time past that your delusions are not all frost-work of fancy. Some of them may be unreal, but I honestly believe there is a truth at the root of them." Rachel made this profession of her faith with a sort of reckless determination, and having made it she would not have hesitated about repeating it, had the occasion offered, either to the aunts or to Mr. Gilsland himself! Alice kissed her again with crazy enthusiasm, overwhelmed her with expressions of gratitude, and would hardly let her go. Rachel was the first person who had given her a gleam of hope and encouragement.

and it was with a heart full almost to agony that she lay down at last, sobbing, "Oh! papa, dear papa, I *shall* see you again, though the time be ever so long!"

VI.

The traces of Alice's passionate emotion were left on her face the next morning, and the excursion that had been planned for the day was deferred by common consent until the morrow.

"She has had one of her most violent moods last night; I see it in her eyes, but she looks exalted nevertheless; what can she have taken into her head now, I wonder?" murmured Miss Delia in distressed anxiety.

The speculation troubled Sinclair too; he saw she had wept a flood, and that now she was singing in her heart rejoicings over some mysterious source of gladness. By and by, after luncheon, he invited her to come out into the air, and they wandered away alone by the river beyond Fürstemburg, not talking much on the way until they came to a group of walnut-trees in a shady little hollow, where she suggested that they might rest.

"You are very tired, Sunshine," said he, as she dropped with a weary sigh on the soft warm turf; "lean against my arm—so; you will never weep yourself into stone like Niobe, but you will melt away from me like a cloud if you let these wild fancies fret you every day in this fashion."

"You are not to call them wild fancies any longer, Sinclair, if you love me," was her quick reply. "I know you love me, and I bid you try to believe them too." Sinclair looked as if he had the best will in the world to perform her behests, but could not for sheer perplexity. He kept a grave face, however, and did not smile as his wont was on similar occasions. "I have something to tell you," she went on with confiding earnestness; "but first tell me whether you think Rachel Withers is a shrewd, sensible woman or not?"

"Yes, I think she is a plain, honest little body; but what has Rachel Withers to do with us?"

"*She* thinks there must be something real in what you call my delusions," was the triumphant response.

Sinclair was certainly taken by surprise.

"Does she? On what grounds?" he asked, deliberating.

Alice was not prepared with grounds.

"She thinks so because she does," was all she found to reply, but she uttered it as if it were incontrovertible evidence.

Sinclair smiled now in spite of his endeavors.

"You are laughing at me!" then said Alice pettishly, and withdrew herself from his arm to rest against the tree instead. If his moral support failed her, neither would she have that other.

"Alice!" said he, reproach in eyes and voice; so she came back and told him he was not kind.

"What would you have me do? Hunt this delusion of yours through cloud-land as you are doing? I wish you would let us live at peace on common earth instead!" said he, half in jest, half in vexed earnest.

"No, Sinclair, it troubles my life, it troubles my love for you. Now, when if ever I am to

be happy, I ought to be the happiest, it crosses every hope. If it were but a shadow it would fade, but it strengthens against the brightness. The thought of papa aches in my heart the bitterest when I am near you. It never leaves me now; I hide it, but it is always there. He is somewhere in the world by himself alone, and I am here with you."

Sinclair looked into the pathetic supplication of her lovely eyes, and said,

"Bid me do any thing and I will do it—give me any clue and it shall go hard, but I will run it to the end. Must I seek Mr. Gilsland and try to discover if he has been playing us all false! But why should he—where is the profit to him if he be?"

"That I can not tell, but he is a bad, treacherous man; and if any one knows where papa is he must know. Oh! Sinclair, don't watch me so doubtfully! Am I a fool, am I an idiot, that I should dream dreams like these that harass me night and day? It would be wicked and faithless if I folded my hands and tried to sleep them away, and I can not, I can not! There is much gone out of my memory, but enough remains to assure me that it is truth and not fancy that they grow out of; and things, many things that were dim awhile ago are becoming clearer now."

Sinclair, if not moved to a full acceptance of her belief, was at all events moved to something; for he said,

"Tell me again, Alice, and as explicitly as you can, whatever you recollect before you came to Brookfall."

"It will be for the hundredth time," replied she pathetically; nevertheless she began to recite again all those obscure recollections with which she had once before amazed Rachel Withers when they were on the Claymire downs together. They were such scenes as might paint themselves picture-like on a child's memory, and become worn and half obliterated by lapse of time. She had a confused vision with much terror in it of what Sinclair could only explain as the sword-dance which is danced by the plough-lads in the Northern counties about Yuletide. Then she described a room that was very pretty, where she never touched any thing, and which she never entered but with her father; and another room with dogs on the hearth and a high carved mantle-piece. She had a slight idea of the few days at Bristowe, and of the last good-by on the sea-shore at Hastings; and after that there was nothing but darkness until the episode of the prison life in Paris. Thus far there was nothing inconsistent with Mr. Gilsland's account of her parentage given to the aunts; and of this Sinclair gently reminded her; he had heard of it all before, many, many times with the same result.

"But listen to me further," she said arresting him; "Is any thing we have seen, or felt, or done, ever forgotten? I believe it is not. It hides itself from us, perhaps for long years, but some day the light flashes into the dark corner, and there it lurks. Sometimes it seems as if my memory were playing at hide and seek with me—but it never can again conceal that dreadful place where I first saw Mr. Gilsland. Papa was not there and never had been. He kissed me good-by for the last time on the sea-

shore. This prison had dark, damp blue walls and gratings to the windows, and there was a gray rat ran in and out of a hole in the skirting-board; I gave it bits of my bread and it grew almost tame. I should know that horrible place now if I could see it again. I was always cold and hungry there, and when I cried in my misery they beat me. Then I used to try and say 'Gentle Jesus'—Sinclair, I could cry *now* to think of myself doing that, as if I were some other little wretched child. 'Gentle Jesus' was the little hymn I used to say for prayers at home with papa; I forgot it for years and years after I came to Brookfall, but one day you remember when I was reading a book at the rectory I found it quoted as a Catholic child's hymn, and all in a moment I knew it. I used to say 'Gentle Jesus,' but in the book where I met with it again it was printed 'Holy Jesus.' I am not a little child any longer, but every night I say it before going to sleep—it is the only clear, complete thing left me of the days when I was happy with papa except his face—and I should know him, Sinclair, if I met him in a desert or on the top of one of the pyramids of Egypt."

Sinclair suggested that he must have grown older and have changed somewhat since they parted.

"He can not have grown so old but that I shall know him," was her fervent answer, and then she fell silent.

Sinclair sat musing and silent too. Of *names* of persons or places she could not recall one; evidently names, mere *sounds*, did not live in her mind like *sights*—things beheld with the bodily eyes. When she first saw Lady Georgiana Warleigh at Claymire she had insisted upon it to Rachel Withers and to Sinclair also that a mutual recognition had passed like a flash between them; but she could not afterward connect her with any distinct portion of her recollections. Sinclair meditated on this. Of all the faces he had ever seen, easy to be remembered, perhaps Lady Georgiana Warleigh's was one of the easiest. Pallid and deeply pitted with the small-pox as it was, it could hardly have changed by a single line since those dreadful scars of disease were imprinted upon it. Her countenance was one of those which, met but once and in a throng of strangers, could never again be forgotten; a harsh, powerful visage it was, mask-like in its unchangeability; with gray green eyes shallow as a reflection on polished steel; with a strong jaw and teeth sharp and glittering in a narrow thin-lipped mouth—cruelty and remorseless determination its most marked characteristic. Her lithe, serpentine grace of form and manner would only be a repellent force the more coupled with her marred face; and fear, abhorrence, and dread had been from the moment of their meeting Alice's only feelings toward her.

Sinclair revolved these circumstances over and over in his mind until he caught himself saying like Rachel that there might be something in Alice's delusions; he forebore to tell her so yet, however, and only promised that if she would try to be brave and cheerful until they reached home again, then he would set to work on Mr. Gilsland with such evidence as she had given him, and do his best to discover what was hidden, *if any thing*.

"It is no use implying a doubt, Sinclair, you will never shake my faith," replied she smiling. "I am very, very happy, but those old stories always give me a heart-ache!" and she pressed a hand hard against her bosom as she spoke.

"My darling, you shall keep your faith for me!" said Sinclair, touched by the pathetic gesture. "You must have suffered when you were little. You made early acquaintance with hardship, but let my love compensate you for that past. Live in the present, Alice, don't look always far back or far forward when you should be bright now."

And then they went to their home again, Alice conscious of more strength in her hopes than ever, and loving Sinclair and all the world better for the assurance. Throughout the evening she was quiet and meditative, and had Rachel Withers been anxious to speak of what had passed between them the night before, she must have taken the initiative, for which she had neither the courage nor inclination. She expected Sinclair to say something in reference to it, and for this she had not long to wait. After tea the young man called her out into the balcony and repeated all that Alice had told him.

"For my part," then said he, "I am well contented with things as they are; but since she can not rest and you have given your support to her belief, something must be done. I have promised her that if she will be good until we go home I will take Mr. Gilsland in hand myself, and do my utmost to discover if there be any trickery in his dealing with my aunts about her. Meanwhile let the matter rest quietly among ourselves—they have been worried about it enough already; and I would rather not see them unnecessarily fretted now."

Rachel was thankful to acquiesce in this arrangement of the difficulty; during the day she had been a good deal disquieted by her rash admission of the night before; but she now perceived that Sinclair's incredulity also had been shaken. When Alice whispered at her good-night that he was going to try to *find out*, she understood that he had forbidden her to refrain from talking over her hopes. And this he had done. For the present his own faith in them was so slight that he wished them to gain no new strength from being dwelt on in conversation; and Alice, stilled by his promise and her own implicit reliance on it followed his wise counsel without a murmur.

VII.

On the following morning when Rachel Withers and Carrie Martin went down to the little salon to pay their compliments to their friends they found Miss Delia occupying it alone; all the others having set off already on an excursion to the Blue Lake, Mortimer Warleigh accompanying them. The old lady was at her work and said she should be glad of their society; so they staid and bore her company, she, as usual, leading and absorbing the conversation.

Miss Delia's irresistible propensity to do every body good has been mentioned before, and those who understand the powerful nature of this propensity will also understand how it must have been urging her in the direction of Carrie Martin ever since that singular and misguided person came within her reach. A more unpromising

subject for her benevolent practices she would have had to go far to find; Carrie had long since made up her mind to live her life in her own fashion, and according to her own tastes, and was not likely to put herself in bonds to any—the best meaning woman in the world.

But worthy Miss Delia was troubled with no doubts. She felt her good intentions burning in her heart, and she sat down systematically to her task, throwing in her little attacks wherever she saw that Carrie was weakest. Rachel looked on, not altogether unamused, while Carrie, unaware of Miss Delia's designs, received her mild attempts without resistance. She rather liked women of the Ferrands' order. "They are genuinely good and true," said she, "though more worldly-wise than they appear on the surface. It is they who can afford to have amiable crotchets and to perform charitable eccentricities. Providence takes care of them, they are clothed like the lilies of the field; they open their mouths and they are filled. Good. Set them to a day's work for a day's bread, and they would sleep hungry. Fortune does for us better than we can do for ourselves."

Thus when Miss Delia talked in her hazy fluent style on spiritual matters, Carrie composed her countenance, and was patient and non-understanding. She would not have hurt the kind soul's feelings for the world; she hoped that every Christian sect had salvation in the midst of its errors of doctrine and system, and would never have ventured on the responsibility of disturbing any body's faith for the sake of bringing them over to her own little private views. Carrie had been brought up herself among the strictest sect of the Evangelical party, and had broken away from their narrowness of rule since she came to maturity; but for old sake's sake, when she heard Miss Delia prose like certain ancient, dear kinswomen of her own who once bored her to extinction, she listened and was eminently respectful.

But when the adventurous old lady forsook Things Unseen and aspired in her innocence to reform Carrie's mode of life and to abolish her frivolous writings, then Carrie pricked up her ears and rallied to the defense, demanding sarcastically if Miss Delia had duly considered before she administered her dose of advice what would be the result suppose it were taken? No, Miss Delia said, she had not.

"The result would be the abandonment of all my means of living," answered Carrie. "Now it is a fixed idea of mine that nobody for prejudice's sake should interfere with another person's lawful gains who is not prepared to indemnify him for his losses. If you will settle two or three hundred a year on me for life, Miss Delia, it may be worth my while to take into consideration what you have got to say; if you can not do this, you must not meddle with my way of earning the money, which is not wrong of itself, but only against the grain of certain venerable prejudices which you entertain." The serene audacity of this speech took Miss Delia quite aback; she had not a word to offer in reply, and, as might be expected, she let Carrie and her idle works alone for the future.

The travelers, Mortimer Warleigh excepted, remained three days longer at Remagen—three quiet drowsy days that passed very pleasantly to

all of them. The piano beguiled the lazy hours that they could not spend out of doors. Alice did not attempt ambitious songs, but her voice was delicious. She appeared to feel great enjoyment in her gift too; and her aunt Flora told Rachel that whenever she was mentally out of tune at home, she always took refuge in her piano, and the airs she played then would be a sure key to her mood. Going by this criterion, she was in a dreamy reverie now, mingled of hope, joy and sadness; and her face in its abstracted calm betrayed a mind resting and waiting among many perplexing thoughts.

The weather was hot, with short sharp showers at intervals to cool the air. One night there was a thunder-storm that eclipsed the sunset, but the atmospheric effects upon the hills were grand, and grand too was the sonorous aerial chorus that reverberated among them. For fairer times there was the charming walk by the river toward Fürstenburg under rich fern-draped cliffs that were lovely in their moist luxuriance of fern and flower; and on a lofty hill above the town was an exquisite church but recently rebuilt. For situation it was enchanting, and within and without for rich unity and completeness of design it was admirable. There was a monastery close by which looked bare and poverty-stricken enough, and Miss Delia had her eyes shocked or delighted—it is uncertain which—by the spectacle of an exceedingly comely young monk in brown robes, with his cowl hanging down his back and his breviary under his arm, rushing across from the church to the house. She screwed up her eyes and gasped and looked very much horrified in the face, but she extracted so much pathetic disquisition from the incident afterward that it was generally believed that she would on no account have missed it. She had seen a monk, she told them at the inn, and he was very much like that handsome wife of the wheelwright's at Claymire—she was not laughing, poor fellow, he really was.

The last evening went by cheerfully. The elders were homesick and glad to see the end of their travels near at hand; and Alice had her private reasons to be glad too. Miss Delia, with a little comfortable air of mystery, whispered once to Rachel that she should perhaps have *something* to tell her when they met again at home, but for the present she would give her no *hint* of it. Rachel teased, and said why did Miss Delia indulge herself and tantalize her by intimating that there was a happy secret on the way, unless she meant to explain herself further? but the old lady only laughed, saying she knew Rachel's spirit of inquisitiveness, and she must just wait her time for relief. But Rachel was not much worried; she had a tolerably accurate guess as to what Miss Delia's grand secret must be.

And on the morrow the travelers separated, and went each party their separate way; the Ferrands home by Verviers, Paris, and Rouen, Rachel Withers and Carrie Martin by the route through Belgium.

CHAPTER THE FIFTH.

A LOST LINK.

THE unjust man shall not live out half his days.

I.

"OSTEND is a horrid place, Rachel," observed Carrie Martin, as she sat with her friend in their room at Brussels.

"Yes, I have always heard so—but what have we to do with Ostend?" said Rachel in reply.

"It has a magnificent marine-parade, and is the fashionable watering-place for all North Germany." Rachel looked up to see if her companion were reading from the guide-book; but no, she was lying back in her chair quite at ease.

"Do you want to go there, Carrie?"

"Yes—if you have no objection; just for two or three days of sea breezes before returning to London. I shall not get out of it again until next year at this time probably. You are sure you will not very much dislike it, Rachel?"

Rachel was sure she should not dislike it at all; the sea was always welcome and pleasant to her; and the following morning they found themselves at Ostend, comfortably established within three minutes' walk of the Parade.

It was very wild weather—more like November than July—but they made their way to the pier in the afternoon, notwithstanding, to watch the English boat beat into harbor; and though they could hardly keep their feet, there they staid for a couple of hours, making believe to enjoy the bluster for their health's sake. It was a fine sight to watch the massive gray-green waves rolling in and breaking against the sea-wall, while the wind rent off their foam-crests, and spurned them in showers of spray through the air. They were thoroughly drenched and chilled before they could resign themselves to the idea of a quiet evening at their inn, but at length even Carrie, who had an almost crazy liking for a stormy sky, suggested that perhaps they had had enough of it; and as she began to shiver and turn blue Rachel agreed with her.

They therefore set their faces once more toward a refuge, and while steering their difficult way along the Parade, dotted with adventurous sight-seers like themselves, Rachel observed, staggering along before them, a figure which she was sure she knew; and on approaching nearer she recognized Mr. Gilsland. He had stopped about a dozen paces in front of them, being seized with a violent paroxysm of coughing, and was supporting himself by one of the benches that stood along under the wall. His lean, colorless hand clutching the back, struck Rachel first, and an irresistible impulse of pity caused her to pause and say, before she thought what she was doing: "Oh! Mr. Gilsland, you are very ill; this is no day for you to be out of doors!"

He started and stared at her with painful, pallid eyes, while Carrie whispered, "There is death in the man's face, Rachel?"

Rachel hoped he did not overhear the incautious words, though it could matter little

whether he did or not; he must have known the truth before, and the next moment he said as much: "I am so ill that there can be but one end to it, and the sooner it is over the better."

Rachel felt inexpressibly shocked and distressed; she stood silent and motionless, the tears in her eyes, unwilling to go on, yet bewildered what else to do, until Carrie helped her out of her strait. Carrie had no special sympathy with prosperous sinners, but show her any one ill or forsaken, though they might have been ever so bad and notorious, and she was full of service and active pity. She would have stopped to succor a friendless dog in the streets. She now inquired of Mr. Gilsland if his wife were at Ostend with him, and being told that she was not, she asked further if they could be of any assistance to him in any way. He said he should like to talk to Rachel on the morrow or the day after if she would see him. Rachel observed that he called her by her name; she was, indeed, the last straw of human sympathy he found to cling to in his drowning misery. Her mind at once rushed to the thought of Alice, and she said she would see him—not on the morrow, which was Sunday, but on the following morning. Poor, guilty, forlorn wretch! there was no longer need for alarm, and no longer leisure for temporizing; Death would soon absolve him from all his perils, and take away the chance of purging his burdened conscience by confession.

All this while the wind was blowing about them like a hurricane; it seemed wonderful how his broken emaciated frame could bear up against it, but when Carrie suggested that they must move on to some shelter, he crawled by them into the town, and they left him at a cabaret near the ramparts, and not far from their own inn. When he was gone up to the wretched room which was the only habitation left him, Rachel, looking behind, saw the woman of the house at the door, and leaving Carrie for a moment, she returned, asked a few questions, then put into her hand what would purchase decent care and nurture for him as long as his ebbing life seemed likely to last. Bittersweet was right. She could not see this man she had once loved, sick and in misery, and pass him by on the other side. An exceeding pitifulness swelled in her heart as she remembered his life, begun with almost arrogant hopes, and ending in such shameful wreck. When she overtook her friend again there were great tears brimming her eyes and rolling down her cheeks. Carrie knew that it would not comfort her to call him all the scamps and scoundrels in creation, nor yet to deliver a homily on the natural issue and conclusion of his life, therefore she held her peace and contented herself with pulling down Rachel's veil over her face.

The next day was the Fête-dieu and the beginning of the Kermesse. The wind was still very high and the grand street procession of priests and people with their sacred images and banners had a hard struggle against it. The friends went out on the Parade, however, and in passing the cabaret where Mr. Gilsland lodged they saw his white face leaning toward the glass and looking after the throng. The following morning the town was in a tumult with the fair,

and the weather blew so loud and shrill that Carrie Martin openly regretted having come to Ostend at all. It was a noisy little den where Mr. Gilsland was hiding; all that day and the next Rachel did not venture to approach it, for it overflowed with soldiers and country-folks celebrating the Kermesse with heavy libations of beer, and songs that echoed down the street tumultuously. She wished anxiously that he could have been removed to quieter quarters, but nobody was found willing to take in a sick man to nurse at the season when all the North was sending its tribes to Ostend for their annual sea-dip.

On the Wednesday there was calm round the little tavern, and she went to the door, where the woman met her with the news that Mr. Gilsland was writing and had forbidden any one to disturb him. Rachel had not courage to be urgent—she, in her heart, shrank from the spectacle of his ruin; but she imagined there was a duty for her to do; something for her to hear; and later in the day she returned and renewed her application to see him. She was too late. He was gone. The woman of the house told her that on going up to his room with his dinner about noon, she found him leaning back in his chair *dead*; a number of sealed letters on the table before him; the pen with which he had written them in his fingers still. Rachel went away without a word.

It had been a rapid break-up of the constitution with Mr. Gilsland. He had come over to Ostend shortly before Christmas to evade his debts, and had been attacked almost immediately with severe inflammation of the lungs. Poor living and neglect completed the mischief this had begun; symptoms of consumption declared themselves; he had not the means to seek a more genial climate, nor perhaps the inclination. His wife had refused to come to him, or to afford him any maintenance out of her fortune, which at their marriage had been settled securely on herself; and thus he had been kept for months hovering on the brink of destitution; saved only from the last extremity by the scant wages of his guilt, sent to him at irregular intervals through Dr. Frith.

When Rachel returned to their inn after a very brief absence, Carrie saw at a glance that all was over. There was a touch of the grotesque-pathetic in her passion of grief. Carrie did not offer her conventional phrases of comfort. She sat in her chair regarding her, letting her tears have their way, and considering within herself how curiously and wonderfully women's hearts of the good sort are made. Here was a man—a very vermin amongst men—dead, and a woman weeping for him as for a lost love and saint on earth! When there came a lull, Carrie did not allude to his meannesses, his frauds, his hypocrisies, or bid Rachel remember how little worthy he was of her tears; on the contrary, she tried to say of him any good she could recollect ever to have heard any body else say, and the calm was effectual.

"He had no courage, that was where he failed first; and the first step wrong set him so far wrong altogether that he could never get right again," said Rachel when she gained a tolerable command over her voice. "People who are not tempted in the same way should not judge

him. I was very fond of him once—I don't think a day has gone over my head since I was a girl that I have not thought of him more or less. I never cared for any body else as I did for him, never—I suppose you will say I am a fool."

"Not at all—I never call love wasted. If it does nothing else it keeps one's own heart warm," replied Carrie, adding as a private mental reservation, "Commend me to these quiet women for long memories." By and by she observed aloud that this event would hinder the inquiries about Alice. "Moral certainties are very well as far as they go, and I am morally certain she is no niece of Mr. Gilsland's; but it would have facilitated measures if he had said so. What will Sinclair Ferrand do now, I wonder!"

"I had forgotten all that!" sighed Rachel. Of course she had—she was dreaming of Hurtledale and sunshine and old times and the things that might have been and never were; culminating in that rigid figure dead in the chair which she had not seen but vividly imagined, and the authorities taking possession of his papers and speculating over the English priest dying neglected in a low, miserable tavern.

Presently Carrie suggested that they should pack up their chattels, order their bill, and leave Ostend by that night's boat; but Rachel's keen, remonstrant No, apprised her that she meant to stay and see Mr. Gilsland buried. She did stay, and in the wind and rain stood by while he was laid in his dishonored, alien grave—the only mourner, if she could be called a mourner, who followed him with a regret or a tear to that bourne. His life of mean ambitions, shifts, compromises, was ended, and the moral of it may be briefly summed up in that pithy sentence, that "to be weak is to be wicked."

The same night Carrie and her companion crossed over to Dover in wild stormy weather, and by the next Rachel was quiet and safe at home again in her cottage at Claymire after that bad, sorrowful dream.

II.

It was inexpressibly pleasant and soothing to Rachel to be still again after the continual movement of the last six weeks and the wearing excitement of the final days at Ostend. The Ferrands were at home and Brookfall was at its brightest again; sunshine without and sunshine within, and Miss Flora and Miss Delia in the very best of good humors. They saw Rachel for a few minutes the morning after her return, but finding her visibly fatigued and needing rest, they would not stay then, and made no opportunity of telling her their happy little mystery, but she had a very shrewd guess what it was. She believed Sinclair had made his lover's profession of faith to Alice, that Alice had responded to it, and that the good aunts were inclined to rejoice. And she was right.

Rachel had been at home full a week before she felt herself equal to returning the visits of her friends and acquaintance; but one morning at the end of that time she roused herself and made an effort to walk up to Brookfall. It was that hour of the day when the pretty place wore its most picturesque aspect; when the lights were the strongest and the shadows the deepest

in the narrow ravine down which poured the slender cascade that gave it its name. Insensibly the familiar beauty, the pure air, the balmy breeze cheered her; her thoughts got away from that blank grave at Ostend, and she saw that the sky was blue, and the sun shining, and pleasant life in the world for all its shadow.

She arrived at the cottage at a most inopportune season, as she perceived directly she was ushered into the drawing-room, but retreat was then too late, and she was compelled to see and hear the contest between Miss Delia and her *protégée* which was going on in the presence of Miss Flora and Dr. Ferrand. Miss Delia was flurried and heated exceedingly, and as soon as her greetings with Rachel were over she broke forth into explanations.

"Rachel, we have heard this day that poor Mr. Gilsland—Alice's only relative as you know, is dead; and would you believe that the naughty puss absolutely refuses to put on mourning for him? I think I never in my life before heard of such shocking perversity." This sudden announcement of what Rachel knew so well already nearly upset her; she had made no mention to any one of the event that had detained her at Ostend. She was a bad feigner; but she said, Yes, she had heard of Mr. Gilsland's death; and then, while the doctor retreated to what was called the Prospect Window and lost himself as much as possible in the view to avoid hearing his sister's repetitious arguments, she nervously took a seat opposite the delinquent and listened.

Alice was sitting on the ottoman arrayed in a bright blue muslin dress, with her Leghorn hat on her lap, and in the crown of it a heap of flowers which she had gathered into it as into a basket. She had her stubborn face on, but for all that a smile was lurking about her lips, and when she glanced across at Rachel there was no mistaking her expression of willful defiance. Any one less in mourning mood could not well be imagined.

"It is in *The Times*—he died at Ostend more than a week ago, and now his widow has sent a card," Miss Delia proceeded in an excited tone. "It is not that we admire him, though many did, or that Alice could be expected to love him, but I have no idea of kinship being thrust aside as not of any account. There is a certain respect that must and ought to be paid to ties of blood. I would not have her go into deep crape—that is not called for—neither need she give up her hat in the garden, but I shall insist on her wearing a black dress."

"I hate black!" ejaculated Sunshine. "I wore black when I was a miserable, friendless, beaten little girl, and I will never wear black again so long as I am happy; never, never, never! and I am happy now."

"Hush, darling, hush!" interposed Miss Flora mildly; "you must not speak in that way. Death is a very serious consideration, and it will come to you some day, though you never so happy."

Alice took up a spray of ivy-geranium and a crimson rose, and proceeded to dress her hat therewith; then she emptied the rest of her garden spoils beside her on the ottoman, and leisurely arranged them into a posy for her band. It seemed as if she were bent on making herself

as gay and festive as possible. Miss Delia observed her with heightened color and reproachful eyes. "Alice, what possesses you?" said she, solemnly. "You are heartless, you are wicked just now. You rejoice that Mr. Gilsland is dead—you are thinking he can never molest you again!"

"He can never molest me again!" echoed Alice, growing grave all at once. "He can never molest me again! That is good news—why should I pretend to grieve at hearing it? You used to say to me once—afraid yourself—that he could claim me if he would, and take me away from you. I have not forgotten it. But now his power is at an end, and I am glad—yes, I am very glad!" And she crowned herself with her garlanded hat in token thereof, looking from one to the other of her audience with perfect composure and assurance.

"He did not persecute you much after you came to Brookfall, Alice; you might afford to forgive him now," murmured Miss Flora. "Your fate would, perhaps, have been worse had he not taken charge of you when your father died."

Rachel looked up at Alice as these quiet words were spoken, and saw a great wave of emotion pass over her face. She was silent till her heart settled into a calm again, and then she said in a low but most determined tone that gathered force as she went on, "I never believed that my father was dead, aunt Flora, and I do not believe it yet. If Mr. Gilsland has told the truth about me, I will forgive him; if not, I shall loathe his memory even more than I loathed his name. He took me away when I was wretchedly ill and unhappy, but it was not from my father he took me. It was from amongst cruel strangers who were worse to me than he was. It is not all clear to me now, but it comes by glimpses; and some day it will come like lightning, and I shall see dear papa again. I shall, aunt Delia, I tell you I shall; I have said so to Sinclair a thousand times, and it is true!"

Miss Delia breathed a profound sigh; these were Alice's old assertions that were too mad to be answered; she had heard similar speeches often before with as little heed as she heard them now. She passed them over as calmly as if they had never been uttered, and took up again the first bone of contention. "Miss Edge will come this afternoon to try you on, Alice, and I desire that you will not go out of the way. You must have a paramatta for common wear, and nice silk with crape trimmings for better occasions."

"It is of no use causing them to be made, auntie Dee, for I will never put them on," was the firm reply. "Mr. Gilsland was no more akin to me than I am akin to the man in the moon." Perhaps a stronger illustration of the argument could not have been offered, and it exasperated Miss Delia to the utmost. She bade Alice leave the room, and without a moment's hesitation Alice left it accordingly—perhaps not sorry to be dismissed.

The doctor came away from the Prospect Window as Alice quitted the room, and Miss Delia immediately asked, appealing to him, "What do you think of mourning apparel, brother? Is it right or respectful to neglect it?"

The doctor thought in a general way that it might be worn or let alone according to each

person's private feelings or prejudices. His son had communicated to him Alice's wishes and his own pledge to make the researches she desired; and this, combined with her own asseverations, which he had just heard, were not without influence on his mind. He, too, began to think there might be something in Sunshine's vagaries.

"I do not like these modern ways and innovations," was Miss Delia's reply to his opinion. "When we were young the wearing of black was graduated most strictly according to the degrees of relationship, and we even put it on for friends. I do not know how we should have been regarded had we dared to infringe on so proper and universal a custom."

"But we never thought it pleasant wear, Delia dear," observed Miss Flora. "In hot and dusty weather like this it was especially disagreeable. I always disliked it myself."

"Yes, I remember you did; and the smell of black woolen dye is very stuffy," Miss Delia admitted. "But if we ought to do a thing for respect's sake we *ought*, and there is an end of it. One piece of affectation only would I abolish, and that is the widow's cap. It was all very well when women cut off their hair as a sign of sorrow and hereavement, then it was necessary to wear a covering over the head; but now when you see the rich braids and puffs and plaits through the transparent tarlatane, why, it is a mere frivolity to put it on."

The doctor smiled, and the wicked little tongue of a listener at the open window, till now unobserved, startled them all by saying: "But, auntie Dee, it is very becoming. Young Lady Monke looks very pretty in hers, and every body says she is ever so happy since old Sir Roger died who was so dreadful to her—worse than Mrs. Pendarves' Gromio. Would you like to hear a bit of news I have just had from Miss Cripe at the gate!"

"What is it?" asked Miss Delia, forgetting her displeasure in the frank interest she took in her neighbors' affairs. But just at that instant appeared in the distance Sinclair coming up to the house, and Sunshine flashed away to meet him without replying. Then Miss Flora, mildly raising her eyes to look after her, said what Rachel's hopes and expectations had already anticipated.

"I do not know, dear Rachel, that we need keep it a secret from you or from any body now that those two are engaged. We are all very glad, and trust it may turn out for the best. They are dear children both."

"Of course, it will turn out for the best, though Alice is so perverse," added Miss Delia briskly. "Sinclair was always very fond of her and does not care for her caprices; but I expect he will find his hands full when he gets her to manage quite by himself. Now, Rachel, you were aggrieved on a former occasion with Sunshine's bit of love-story; how do you like this one?"

"It is quite right and proper in every way—it could not be prettier or pleasanter," was the ready answer.

The young folks here presented themselves at the window, and Sinclair intimated that they were going for a gallop on the Downs. No objection being raised, Alice disappeared to don habit and hat, and presently the two were seen

to ride through the gate and take the bridle-path up the fields. Miss Delia's remark as they vanished was: "I hope Alice will be back before Miss Edge arrives. I do not like the poor dress-maker to be kept waiting and losing her valuable time."

Very persistent was Miss Delia in things both great and small, but in this matter of putting on mourning for Mr. Gilsland she was likely to find her Sunshine more than a match for her.

III.

When Sinclair and Alice gained the high level of the down they turned off toward Welsbeck, where they had a delicious mile or two of springy turf before them. Alice had fought her little fight with aunt Delia and felt confident of ultimate victory, but the cause of the first shot was now to be reflected on with all its remoter and more serious consequences. She had told Sinclair in the garden the moment they met that Mr. Gilsland was dead, and they now reverted to the same theme; Sinclair introducing it by saying that if Mr. Gilsland were dead there was an end of any appeal through him.

"Yes; we must try another tack," responded Alice with composed assurance. Her companion looked at her set face, perceived that the moment was not one when she would bear railery, and asked what other tack she proposed to try.

"Lady Georgiana Warleigh," said she with prompt decision.

"Alice, it is impossible! *She*—a perfect stranger!" exclaimed Sinclair. "My dear child, show me any thing with a shadow of reason in it, and I will do your bidding to the utmost, but don't send me round the world tilting at windmills. She would set me down for a fool absolute."

"She would look wicked and guilty, and perhaps she would give up—I do not know. She could lie down a world of weaker people, but me she can never hoodwink again. She knew me that day of the strawberry party in the rectory gardens when her husband fainted; she thrust me aside, and then I knew her too—and *she saw I knew her*. I can not bring her distinctly into any of my recollections, but she lurks somehow behind them all."

"I wish you were rather less enigmatical, Alice," said Sinclair, and there was just the faintest inflection of sarcasm in his voice. He had tried this tone on Sunshine's delusions before and found it irritating—he found it dangerous now.

She gave one glance at his face and detected the slight curl of the lip that matched the tone of his voice, and the fire flashed from her heart to her eyes like the blood-crimson to her cheek, and giving her spirited horse a passionate stroke it burst into a gallop and was away like the wind. Sinclair had just time to smile at her beautiful anger, to be vexed at the smile, at himself, when he perceived that in her reckless impetuosity, she had given her horse the rein and had lost all mastery over it. By good luck there was a long breathing stretch of turf before her with a gradual descent to a gate entering on Welsbeck-lane, and if she could guide it in the least there might be no risk of harm to her; if not,—if it swerved right or left there was noth-

ing but certain destruction in the sheer steep of the down. Ride fast after her he dared not, but there was one nearer and more abrupt descent into the road by which he might perhaps make a circuit, meet and stop her if that gate, generally open, should chance to be open now. To think and to do were simultaneous, and tearing away at a break-neck gallop he came into the lane at a lower point; then turned, listening with a sickness of dreadful anxiety for the frantic race he expected to hear coming down the stony way.

No sound—what might not have happened? He reached the gate; there was the horse standing, flecked with foam and trembling in every limb, but there also was Alice, safe and sound on his back, stroking his neck and caressing him, but saying imperially: "Now, my beauty, you have had one gallop to please yourself you must have another to please me." "I think you have both had enough," said Sinclair, speaking in a forced voice—Oh! God, how thankful he was.

"We are not of your opinion," answered Alice, and rode gently up the hill again. The summit reached, she cried, "Now!" used her whip sharply, and was away just the same as before.

Sinclair felt very angry—men always do when they see women needlessly endangering themselves, and he followed at a trot until she, having taken her revenge on her masterly favorite, turned back at a walking pace to meet him. "You may not be afraid, Alice, but I am," said he, and his tone sounded deeply displeased.

Sunshine made him no answer, but rode close at his side in silence, looking straight and steadily before her, until they both rode back into the stable-yard at Brookfall. She could mount and dismount perfectly well without assistance, but she had discovered of late that Sinclair liked to help her—to give her a hand up, or to lift her down; so she always staid for his assistance. She did now. He had been wondering whether she would, and feeling a thousand vexations for having vexed her first, and scolded her after; had he hesitated a second she would have slipped off and escaped, and it might have been a quarrel; but he did not, and as he lifted her from her saddle she looked at him shyly, their eyes met, and they were quite happy again.

Alice never cared to argue herself in the right with any one she loved; if hers were the fault, she liked by and by to be kissed and forgiven; if the fault were any one else's, when her little temper was off, she kissed and forgave—weak perhaps, but wise, and the short way to keep friends. Sinclair preferred it to the long moods of dignity with which some ladies are said to indulge their lovers; and he felt all the more exalted when he had been the victim of a brief caprice. Perhaps he was in the wrong to start with in this instance—nothing love detests like sarcasm—but Alice did not deem it necessary to make him feel it; on the contrary, she asked in the garden after dinner—for he and the Doctor dined at Brookfall that day—if he were really angry with her. Sinclair made a suitable response, and that matter was finally settled.

But, perhaps, after all, hers was the wildest way of winning; for certainly Sinclair felt in a

better frame for encountering the task imposed on him than he had done before; and when Alice revived her fretful subject, and brought Lady Georgiana Warleigh up again, he only said, "But how am I to get at her, and what am I to say when I do?"

"Nothing. Listen to me—a sudden inspiration has come into my head. Lady Georgiana Warleigh is at the Hurltemere House now, and that is near Prior's Bank, is it not? Well, I want to go to Prior's Bank."

"That is practicable enough, at all events. The house is kept in order just as Mrs. Sara Grandage left it, and if you can move my aunts again so soon, I shall be proud to take you all down there. You could not wait until next spring, Alice?"

No, Alice could not wait until next spring; she knew what he meant—they were to be married next spring; but she could not wait until then. "Go to Prior's Bank for the moon-shooting instead of Scotland," said she. Sinclair said he had intended doing so. "Then it is easy to invite us," she rejoined.

"Easier than to get the invitation accepted; however, I will make it. But I should like to have some inkling of what you propose doing when you are there?"

"I can not tell you—I do not know. I feel drawn thither—as I dwell on the thought, I feel strongly drawn thither. Oh! dear Sinclair, do bear with me; do be patient with me."

"I will be patient as Job, pretty sweeting, go on."

"You can not help laughing at me. You think me silly!"

"No, I think you my own wise, bonnie——"

"It is you who are silly now!"

"At any rate we will go to Prior's Bank. Aunt Delia is coming this way, and she seems in a lively vein; let us take advantage of it to win her promise. She will be the worst to manage, I know."

The appeal was made on the spur of the moment, to be received with ejaculations of "Nonsense! Ridiculous! What would he ask next?" But having gained a hearing, he put the thing in quite a reasonable light, and succeeded so far as to prevail on Miss Flora and the Doctor to say they would consider of it. Miss Delia continued obdurate. She never listened to so preposterous a demand in her life: she supposed it was a crazy vagary of Sunshine's, which Sinclair would gratify at every body else's expense; but they would not get *her* to go flitting about the country like a Will-o'-the-wisp, just when they had come home from abroad too. Pshaw!"

They let her alone then, but returning to the charge again and yet again, they at length, through their importunity, wearied her into a reluctant consent. And when Sinclair started off to Hurdledale at the beginning of August, it was quite an understood thing that the Doctor, the aunts, and Alice, should very shortly follow. Rachel Withers also was preparing at the same season to wing her flight northward, and Alice announced to her sober-minded encouraging friend the charming arrangement that would bring them together at pleasant old Prior's Bank.

"You are off the day after to-morrow, and

we go next week, Rachel. The bloom is on the heather, and I shall see Sinclair's moors for the first time in their royal purple. Aunt Flora wishes you to come to Prior's Bank for the first part of our visit. It was your home once, and you must know every inch of ground about the place. We shall need a guide, for even Sinclair is not at home in his own house yet. Is it so very pretty? Is it as pretty as Brook-fall?" This speech of Alice's was made to Rachel on the day after Sinclair Ferrand left her.

"It is quite as pretty, but in a different way," Rachel replied. "It is larger, and though there is no sea, the views are grander and more extensive; on a clear day you can see miles and miles of hill and dale, and the broad bright river like a silver ribbon winding through the midst. From the drawing-room bay window there is an exquisite peep of Hurtle Force, of the ruins in the water-meadows, and of the great old ash trees that are the pride of Prior's Bank. They call it the gem of the dale, Sunshine, and I am sure you will love it, though you will have bleaker winters and shorter summers there than we have at Claymire."

Rachel's last few words brought a rosy smile to Alice's face, a happy conscious softness into her eyes. They were in the garden at Woodland's, seated on the turf by the edge of the brook in the selfsame spot where just a year ago Mortimer Warleigh had spent with them what he called a "beautiful hour."

"Aunt Delia considers herself very ill-used in being obliged to travel again so soon, but we could never go to Prior's Bank and leave her behind," presently said Alice. "She has never been there since she was young, and she can not give me any account of it; but aunt Flora remembers it distinctly." She was now crouching against Rachel's knees, her face averted and her ungloved hand plucking idly at the blades of grass; a shy attitude that forewarned her companion of a confidence coming, or of some inquiry having regard to her mysterious fauces. It came. "Rachel, who lives in Hurtle-dale beside your brother's family—what people of condition, I mean?"

"There is the old Hurtle-mere House—that belongs to Sir Laurence Warleigh; and Floyd's seat—that belongs to the Grantheys; and then, except Prior's Bank, there is no gentleman's place beside until you get down to Brafferton."

"What sort of place is the Hurtle-mere House, Rachel?"

"It is an ancient, stone-built mansion standing high on the side of the fell, with a great pine wood at the back of it. The situation is very wild and lonely; you would think it most desolate, accustomed to the luxuriance hereabouts."

"But is it desolate in summer? It can not surely be desolate in summer—no hilly country is."

"It is pleasanter than certainly. The views from it at any rate are glorious, especially at this time when the moors are purple, and in spring when the trees are coming out and the foliage is fresh and various and all the gorse ablaze with golden blossom. But taking it the whole year round it is a comfortless spot."

"Why does Sir Laurence Warleigh live in it then?"

"Because he prefers it for old sake's sake. But he is rarely there more than a month at a time; he spends his life chiefly in wandering about, and has done so ever since he lost his little daughter."

"Did his little daughter die at the Hurtle-mere House?"

"No, his wife died there, but Annis died at Hastings, where he had left her living with Lady Georgiana Warleigh."

"Annis—that is a singular name; but it sounds to me as if I had heard it before—*Annis*. Rachel, I have a great anxiety to see that Hurtle-mere House; I believe I shall know it. Mr. Mortimer Warleigh described the interior to me at Remagen."

"Did he? then I am sure he would do it better than I, for he knows it better. He has lived there with his father and mother at intervals a good deal during the last two or three years. When you visit it mind and choose a sunshiny day, for then the tarn looks beautiful with the birches drooping over it; but on a gloomy day it is as black as ink."

Alice said she would, then fell into a reverie in which Rachel was not sorry to leave her undisturbed. Since Mr. Gilsland's death some very strange lights had begun to move to and fro over the troubled waters of her thoughts. Thus far she beheld nothing but shapeless suspicions and wreck of old doubts drifting hither and thither; but there was an awed sense upon her as of waiting till something greater should reveal itself, until the sea should cast up its dead, long hidden under the commotion of its waves.

IV.

The day after this conversation at Woodlands Sunshine had a letter from Sinclair,—the first lover's letter he had had the opportunity of writing to her. Rachel Withers might not have heard of the beautiful event perhaps, but that having a communication to make to Miss Flora before setting off on her journey north, she walked up to Brookfall, and in a secluded nook of the plantation there she found Alice, reading the precious document for perhaps the twentieth time. She did not hear Rachel's approach, neither did Rachel spy her until she came full upon her where she sat on the mossy roots of a spreading beech; then she sprang up blushing like the morning, and exclaiming: "Oh, Rachel, how you startled me! I was reading my letter from Sinclair—you will see him before I shall!"

"Yes," responded Rachel and waited, naturally supposing the remark was a prelude to some message or commission; but no, it was simply a little thought outspoken by accident, implying a gentle envy of the great privilege—Rachel would see Sinclair before she did. As nothing came of the pause but a low blissful sigh, Rachel grew aware of her mistake, and proceeded to speak of the lovely weather and other convenient general topics; the only topics Sunshine's mind could embrace at such a moment. She slipped her hand under Rachel's arm and sauntered dreamily along beside her, answering with monosyllables and inarticulate murmurs until they both fell into a sociable silence, and so reached the wicket into the Brookfall gardens. Here Alice endowed her companion with a kiss, and then fled to a cle-

matris-buried bower to con her dear letter again, while Rachel went up to the house to talk prose to the aunts.

She found Miss Delia in a state of lofty, obtrusive resignation. "You set off to-morrow, Rachel, do you? I can not understand all this racing and chasing about the country! We are off again next week, and Sinclair departed the day before yesterday almost without warning. I think every body is gone crazy, but if I am to be driven to Prior's Bank the moment I am peaceably settled at home again, all I can say is that somebody else may take the trouble of it; for I will not put a finger to a single box," proclaimed the old lady, and then arranged herself with great demonstration of ease and comfort in her favorite easy chair.

"There is no need that you should, dear Delia; Hawkins will attend to every thing," said her sister soothingly.

"Hawkins is quite sufficiently occupied with Alice. I told the indolent puss only this morning that she ought to have been born to a great fortune; for she will soon want a maid all to herself."

"And Sinclair will gladly afford her one, I have no doubt."

"Humph!" murmured Miss Delia disapprovingly, for this was quite a different view from that she meant to offer.

But Miss Flora insisted on regarding every thing from the bright side just now. "There was a letter for Sunshine from him this morning, the dear fellow, and it was pretty to see her delight. First she kissed it, then she crushed it against her frock, then she tossed it up into the air and caught it as it came down, laughing and blushing——"

"And looking a perfect goose," added Miss Delia with an abortive attempt to be grim. "I really never knew how silly girls could be until I made Sunshine's acquaintance; nothing would ever astonish me again that I might hear of them. It is lucky Sinclair does not care for a quiet life; I would not be in his shoes for a very pretty penny!"

"Oh, Delia dear, the child is quite natural; she is happy and she can not help showing it," pleaded Miss Flora. "I congratulate myself more and more every hour that Sinclair and she are so strongly attached to each other; I do not expect we shall have any more of her *moods* now. He will make up to her for every body else, you will see."

"I don't wish him to make up to her for us after all our trouble and anxiety—but that is the way of the world; parents and silly people bring up children and somebody else steps in and has all the pleasure of them! Alice is a dear girl, and that I never seek to deny, but she is very, *very* willful and obstinate. Only think of those two black dresses, Rachel——"

"Perhaps you need not tell Rachel *that*, Delia; it was naughty," interposed Miss Flora with hasty deprecation.

"I *shall*—neither Rachel nor any one else would ever believe it without; my dear," she went on turning away determinedly from her sister; "the two mourning dresses for Mr. Gilsland that you heard us differing about the other day, came home from Miss Edge last night, and were laid out on Alice's bed with their belongings all in order for Hawkins to try if they fitted; and when Alice saw them she

flew into one of her tantrums and quite terrified our maid. Hawkins ran away out of sight of her violence, and when she ventured back where do you think those dresses were?" Rachel did not dare hazard a guess. "I'll tell you, my dear," proceeded the old lady wagging her head; "yes, and I shall tell *Sinclair* too when we see him; they were in her bath, my dear, over head and ears in her great bath, as I may say, and the black dye all running out of the paramatta! When Hawkins began to cry shame, as was quite natural, Alice serenely bade her, 'Take away that trash;' and when I tried to remonstrate and show her what wicked, wanton waste of good clothes it was, she just said, ponting her pretty face at me—she deserved to have her ears boxed, she did! 'Kiss me, auntie Dee, and don't be cross. I told you I would not wear them.' Now, I don't think you would find a parallel to that amongst all the girls of your acquaintance, Rachel Withers. I don't know her match."

"And I suppose there was nothing left for you to do but kiss her," replied Rachel, with difficulty keeping her countenance.

"Well, no, there was not. Now that she has Sinclair always to fly to it is no use battling with her, for he takes her part against us always. He will never cure her of her caprices and willfulness either. I am sure he will not."

"He always seems to enjoy them more or less; and if he can not tame her nobody can. Time may do it; I trust trouble will not; for she had her share, poor darling, when she was little," said Miss Flora tenderly.

"Mr. More would have managed her—he would have made of her a solid, estimable character. Yes, I *maintain* it."

"Dear Delia! She would have managed him out of his senses and into a lunatic asylum in a month! Recollect what frenzies she got into at the very idea of marrying him. I think you must have been a little mad yourself ever to fancy such a match as that could possibly succeed!"

"*Mad*, not at all mad! It would have done very well. I do not wish things otherwise than they are *now*; but there are *many* far more unlikely marriages than that would have been made up in the world, which nevertheless turn out very happily. You are as romantic as a girl of sixteen *still*, Sister Flo!"

Sister Flo' took the imputation very meekly. She had been blithe and tender in her youth, and had had her own little love story in her day, but Miss Delia was always a fussy, practical body, superior to vanities, and prone to managing people, and setting the world to rights in her own way; which was occasionally an over-persistent, irritating way, better adapted to machinery of wood and iron, than to beings of flesh and blood and human passions.

Alice's delinquencies disposed of, the journey to Hurtledeale was reverted to, and Rachel was begged to make her arrangements at the rectory, so that she might spend a few days with her friends at Prior's Bank when they first arrived there. Sinclair would have seen her to give the invitation himself, but he had been so much engaged at the last that he could find no spare moment, and had left the message with his aunts instead. Rachel gave a conditional promise, and then they parted, not to meet again until they met in her old home.

PART FIFTH.

FOUND.

CHAPTER THE FIRST.

LADY GEORGIANA'S AGONY.

LEAVE her to heaven,
And to those thorns that in her bosom lodge
To prick and sting her. SHAKESPEARE.

1.

ON arriving at the rectory Rachel Withers to her great pleasure and surprise found Arthur Hill and Grace staying there, and the two boys both at home for their holidays. Altogether they were a houseful. Rachel was put into her own old room, and it was much such an evening as that when her brother John and she came back nearly twenty years ago to make it their home. The open window showed her the same prospect as it did then—the purple moors, the corn-fields ripening to the harvest, the full summer foliage, the silvery rush of the Force; but what changes within and what changes amongst all she loved! It is always rather pathetic to see one's faded face and grizzled hair reflected in the little mirror that once showed us a blooming and sprightly youth. Rachel had never seriously thought how much she was altered until that evening when she was dressing before hers, and then it struck her quite grotesquely. "Gracious," murmured she, "how ancient I begin to look!" And she did begin to look ancient. One or two recent events had left their marks on her face.

This old room of hers was so sunny that Katherine had chosen it for a nursery when Dicky was born, but now that the babies were grown up into big children it had been re-converted into a sleeping room, and all the former furniture was reinstated in its former place. "We call it our *odd-room* now, but I knew you would feel most at home in it," said Katherine as she ushered her in at the familiar, low door. "You see, John has not enlarged the house, as he used to threaten, and he never will now; for I like it best as it is." She looked quite young and gay and as handsome as ever—her two immense boys might have been her brothers instead of her sons.

All at the dear old rectory seemed so cheerful and buoyant that Rachel felt herself in an atmosphere of as pure content and of as full happiness as this world ever gives. They assembled round the dinner-table, children and all, on that first evening, as blithe and pleasant a family party as could be found in the length and the breadth of the land. Arthur Hill had no native gloom in him and his wife had caught some of his gaiety: she was as lightsome again as she used to be and far more given to lively conversation; while John Withers and Katherine were a pattern pair of married lovers whom all their kinsfolk and friends admired. If the sisters had passed a forlorn childhood and lonely youth the lack of happiness had been made up to them with interest since. Lady Foulis was a true prophetess when she told them they were having their worst days at Whinstane, and bade them look forward to the coming of happier

times elsewhere. And her hints to Rachel had been justified too—touching the unsureness of the future. Poor Rachel, poor sober Rachel! who had been so glad some in her heart during that dreary visit to the Tower, and was now the loneliest and dullest of them all! So the wheel of fortune whirls us round, sometimes sunnyside up, sometimes down in the dust and the dark—and we must even take the rough with the smooth, the shade with the shine, and make ourselves philosophical and contented!

But notwithstanding the merry talk and merrier laughter there was a skeleton rattling its bones in the background that night, and many ears at the rectory were awake to its ominous jingle. Rumor was no longer whispering in Hurdledale, but crying aloud, open-mouthed and insolent. The last people to hear her voice are always those most concerned in what she says. Lady Georgiana Warleigh had heard *nothing*, but she suspected *every thing*, and this family gathering at the rectory—which was, in fact, purely accidental—she suspected most of all. What did it mean? Why were they all come together just at this season?

On the morning succeeding Rachel Withers' arrival, Lady Georgiana came down to the rectory betimes accompanied by Mortimer to pay her a visit. She looked very haggard and restless, but she met Rachel with her cordial airy manner, complimented her on her healthful face, congratulated her on her pleasant tour abroad, and hoped she would experience the beneficial effects of it through the winter; talking fast and fluently, and scarcely allowing Rachel to edge in a word. When this had gone on for some time, she made an excuse for dispatching Mortimer to join his cousins out of doors, and they were left to themselves in the drawing-room. Rachel experienced an indefinable sense of uneasiness when thus left alone with Lady Georgiana; she perceived that something more than ordinary was in her mind; she was a subtle, secret woman, and her visage was a very mask for hiding emotion, but while they were talking she several times pressed her handkerchief to her mouth and held it there, and her glance was expressive of the keenest nervous alarm. She gave Rachel the idea that she was in a state of violently suppressed agitation and dread; and also that she was conscious some great thing depended on her exercising self-control. She was dressed with her usual scrupulous simplicity and grace, and all her voluntary gestures were those of a perfectly assumed ease; only a consummate actress could have carried on for so many years with success the drama she had sustained; but now that she heard the footsteps of retribution echoing close and fast after her vain flight, nature overpowered art, and she betrayed again and again to those who were on the watch that Fate had run her out of breath, and that in a very little while her last strength would be spent.

"Now tell me about your travels," she began as soon as they were alone. "Mortimer wrote

that he had met you at several places on the Rhine, and that you appeared to be enjoying your independence amazingly. Did you and your friend quite agree? A solitary tour has its charms, but if you go double, your companion must either suit you to the core, or become speedily a thorn in the flesh. But I suppose you two, having known each other from your youth upward, are as familiar with each other's quips and cranks of character as you are with your own. It must have been extremely pleasant. I could find in my heart to envy you! No ties, no troubles, no any thing to interfere with the delightful novelty. Well, and where did you sail from to come home? From Boulogne, I suppose, as that is the shortest and easiest passage."

"No, we went by Dieppe, and through Normandy; so in returning we took the route through Belgium by way of making the most of our holiday to the end."

"Ah, you sailed from Antwerp to London then? Interesting old city Antwerp is, but the crossing to England very bad. I made it once, but I should never choose to make it again. We had a very rough night out."

"But we did not sail from Antwerp; we took the boat from Ostend to Dover, and that is a disagreeable passage too."

Lady Georgiana was seated opposite to the light, and Rachel with her back to it; at the name of Ostend Lady Georgiana's eyes blinked—it might be from the dazzle of the sun, but it was more probably from a sudden pang; however, she made the glitter on the glass her excuse for changing her seat, and took a chair where the green curtains threw a ghastly shadow on her pallid face, and made it impossible to detect any fluctuations of feeling which she might not have force enough to hide.

"From Ostend you sailed—a detestable place, Ostend," then said she in her dulcet tones. "Pray what could take you to Ostend?"

"My friend's longing for the sea. She makes her home in London, and she wished for a few days' breeze and bathing before plunging into its dusty toils again."

"Really—very nice and convenient, indeed."

Lady Georgiana was reflecting—Rachel was reflecting too. After a few seconds' pause, Lady Georgiana asked at what date they were at Ostend, and if the weather was agreeable. She was told that it was at the beginning of July, and that it was very wild and dismal weather for the season. "And of course you did not continue long? The Germans go there because it is the only place they have, but you who know Claymire and all our lovely Devonshire coasts could hardly be inclined to linger."

"No, we did not enjoy it much, and I should certainly never care to revisit it," said Rachel. She began to perceive that this close interrogation had a design in it; Lady Georgiana's next words unfolded it, and made her heart leap.

"I read in *The Times* not long ago that poor Mr. Gilsland was dead at Ostend. We attended his church once. What a very eloquent man he was, but sadly unprincipled. You used to know him—did you happen to see him while you were there?"

"Once, for a few minutes only. It was on the Marine Parade, one very windy afternoon, when we had gone down to see the English boat

come in. He looked very ill then—yes, I knew that he was dead. Miss Delia Ferrand received a mourning card from his widow, and she mentioned it to me." Deceitful Rachel! she had told no one, nor did she mean to tell any one, how she had followed the forlorn, forsaken wretch to his grave in the wind and the rain.

"Miss Delia Ferrand? Oh, yes, of course, the melancholy intelligence would be sent to her as having charge of his niece. Did you know, Rachel, that my poor boy took a fancy to that child's pretty face last summer, and nothing would satisfy him but he must follow her abroad this spring? But it was to no purpose—he came back as he went. Sinclair Ferrand had used his opportunities and secured her beforehand—rather an unusual ending between two young people who have been almost brought up together. I suppose it is a suitable marriage; I liked her appearance, and if Mortimer had had better luck neither his father nor I would have regretted it."

"Every one approves of the match," said Rachel. "They are deeply attached; they are young, and they are good. Alice has been like a daughter to the ladies at Brookfall. Mortimer is light-hearted, and will find him a new love by and by."

"No fear of it! He has not taken his disappointment *au grand sérieux*." Here ensued a brief silence; Lady Georgiana's dread lest Rachel might have had any communication with or from Mr. Gilsland at Ostend was set at rest; but she had further inquiries to make, and she next introduced the subject of Prior's Bank and of Sinclair Ferrand's being there at present; precluding it with an allusion to Sir Laurence's extensions of territory in Hurtledeale.

"My husband used to say that his brother's property here would never be complete until he could add to it the gem of Hurtledeale; but when Mr. Bond negotiated with Philip Grautley lately for the purchase of some land adjacent he was assured that Prior's Bank would not be sold on any terms as the owner himself intended living there. I understand young Ferrand is here now, though we have none of us seen him. I tell Mortimer it would only be courteous if he called. Will he settle here when he marries? He was all for wide-world travel when I had a little gossip with him once during our stay at Claymire, but perhaps a wife will change his ways."

Rachel could not enlighten her—she had heard very little talk of the marriage. In spite of all her efforts to be at ease, a certain guarded formality would creep over her manner while talking to Lady Georgiana, who seemed to be endeavoring to sift her—to find out if she had any thing to hide. Rachel had nothing to hide, but she caught herself speculating more than once on what it could be that she was supposed to have. John and Katherine came in before the sitting was at an end, but Lady Georgiana did not remain long after they appeared; and the few minutes she did remain were taken up with inquiries about her husband. As she was shaking hands at the last she begged Rachel to go up to luncheon at the Hurtlemeare House on the following day. "Oliver would like to see you, and hear about your travels. He has so few pleasures now that it is a charity when any one will come up for an hour or two and talk to him," said she.

Rachel had no excuse ready, and therefore she

acquiesced, though she would have been glad to evade the visit. She did not relish the close catechizations to which Lady Georgiana subjected her because she could not see their drift. This morning's talk had confused her a good deal, and present thinking did not make the confusion clear. But she took a walk with Sacharissa Tulip and the boys over the fell, and that did her a benefit; strengthened her and steadied her for what was to come when she got back to the rectory again and found John and Katherine, Arthur Hill and Grace sitting in secret conclave in the study with locked doors.

John came out and took her in amongst the other white faces, just saying, "Take off your bonnet and lay it down here, Rachel. We have something dreadful to tell you. A rumor is flying all round the dales that Sir Laurence Warleigh's poor little wildling is alive. There—don't scream or faint, but just sit down and try if you can throw any light on it; for none of us know whence it has arisen, or what spark has kindled up this little fire and much smoke."

"If she be alive I know her—if she be alive, Alice Gilsland and Annis Warleigh are one and the same person," said Rachel, speaking slowly, deliberately, with the voice of full conviction.

"Alice Gilsland—that is the girl Lady Georgiana has been so anxious for Mortimer to marry," added Grace.

"Then the whole plot is out," said Arthur Hill, and every body was silent, each one looking on another with pallid dismay. The whole plot was out.

Upon Rachel it came in an instant, like a flash, a revelation. Her heart bounded as if it had been let go out of a vice, and all the dead facts that had been accumulating in her mind, silently, insensibly, ever since she looked through the old county history for the Lady Eleanor Seymour whose portrait was a likeness of Alice, and found that her maiden name was *Gwynne*, sprang up quickened into perfect life! Her face became the color of pale gray marble, and when the silence was broken and every tongue began to question her at once, she could only articulate a faint supplication that they would let her get away to her own room, and give her time to *think it out*.

II.

Shut up alone in that retreat, Rachel threw open the window, locked the door, and secure from interruption, set her mind to work. She endeavored to feel her way through the web mesh by mesh; to arrange her recollections in order; to marshal her facts in rank. First returned Mrs. Lupton's garrulous prattle, and her story, distinct, entire; then Lady Georgiana's few trivial sounding words of information about the nurse and the doctor which had tinged her mind with suspicion anew after it had been free for years from the doubts that Bittersweet had discouraged as dangerous.

Then she recalled certain incidents of the last twelve years which wove themselves into a perfect network. A thousand trifles, each one light as air, added themselves into a complete whole within the circle of her memory, until the sum of them grew into an invincible conviction that Annis, the poor little gipsy long mourned as dead, and Alice, the bonnie Sunshine of Brook-fall, were one—*identical*.

The very steps that had been taken to impede discovery now helped it. So many things inexplicable at the time of their occurrence now explained themselves—the peculiar familiarity of intimacy with Mr. Gilsland, the straitened means of Oliver Warleigh and his wife; Alice's repudiation of her mother's supposititious miniature; her wild-sounding talk on the downs, which was after all the *truth* glimmering through a haze. And earlier circumstances than these—the avoidance of her godmamma Grandage and herself by the Gilslands at Amiens when they were removing the child from her temporary concealment in Paris; the pitiful sketch of Annis at her barred prison-window; the poor little waif's flight from her merciless jailers at Welsbeck, and all the hurried tragedy of Mr. Gilsland's death. And last but not least, Alice's persistent faith in what were called her delusions, and the mutual recognition which she asserted to have passed between herself and Lady Georgiana when they met at Claymire in the rectory gardens after the lapse of a dozen years. There was not an essential link wanting. Rachel's great marvel when she held the complete chain in her grasp was that she had not seen it growing.

And then there was the telling of the whole wicked story over to John and Arthur, Katherine and Grace: and she told it. Katherine heard it, her hands twisted together, and uttering every now and then inarticulate cries of suffering. She was thinking of her brother Oliver, and of his most wicked and miserable wife. During his long affliction she had grown very pitying and tender over him.

"Oh, Rachel," said she at the end, "*if it be true*, it is very terrible; *if it be true*, they did the child a cruel, cruel wrong, but it has brought forth to them none but bitterest fruit!"

"No; whatever she may have suffered, God knows they have suffered tenfold more!" responded John.

They sat silent a little while after this, each one endeavoring to grasp the facts as Rachel's memory and imagination had pieced them together. At length Arthur Hill asked how she, who had known Alice now two or three years intimately, never came to discover the truth before. "How can I tell—I did not *discover* it finally," replied she. "I am no plotter or hunter after secrets. Suspicion seems to me to have been converging toward the light from every side; I have no evidence to give beyond what you have now heard; but it is enough."

"Enough, yes! It can not be shut up in the dark any longer; the whole disgraceful fraud must be searched into, let the results be what they may," said John. "It has triumphed too long already."

"Oh, dear John, let nothing be done in haste," pleaded Katherine. "Wait and see; Lady Georgiana says Mortimer has a fancy for the poor child—if they could marry, would not that right it all without need of blazoning it to the world?"

John shook his head, smiling pitifully over his wife's womanish device for righting so great a wrong, and then turning to Rachel he asked what Alice herself remembered. "She was between four and five years old when she went to Hastings; she must have been fully five when rescued from the Gilslands—she should have her recollections."

"And so she has," said Rachel. Then she recited Alice's repudiation of the false miniature, her rejection of all Mr. Gilsland's accounts of her father, and her romantic, hazy reminiscences of her home with him. "But think how cruelly they used her," she went on, "they tried to crush all life out of her memory, and that long sickness at Brookfall would help their malice. She fully believes that her father is alive, and I have little doubt but that she would recognize him did they meet."

"Laurence is abroad, contented and unsuspecting," interposed Katherine. "It is not *certain*, John; it may half of it be the tissue-work of Rachel's imagination; Lady Foulis is doting, and wider tales than this have been bruited abroad which have turned out false when put to the proof. Think what agony for Laurence, what shame for Oliver, for all of us, if the dreadful accusation were made and found incapable of being sustained."

"My Kate, you believe it yourself," was John's conclusive answer. "We have a work of justice, of restitution put upon us to do, and we must do it without fear or favor. Only the means must be well considered first. Laurence is in Holland—him we must summon. *She* is coming to Prior's Bank in a week—a meeting must be the test; perhaps it will be the quickest and least painful test, from what Rachel says."

"You will warn them at the Hurltemere House first—don't let Laurence see Oliver in his first rage," said Grace, who had not spoken yet. "And there are those kind old ladies who have taken care of her to be thought of."

"And Sinclair Ferrand," added Rachel; and then she told them of Alice's engagement to the nephew of her benefactresses.

"Moral certainties are very well as far as they go, but they are not evidence," said Arthur Hill. "If the grave were opened and found to contain the remains of a child tallying in age with Annis; if the meeting on which you rely so much were not crowned by a recognition; and if the instruments of the abduction kept faith with each other and dared you for proofs, I do not see where you would be. There have been mysterious disappearances and reappearances before this which have afforded a good deal of legal fighting ground. Mrs. Lupton looks good metal—she will tell no tales; and Doctor Frith, unless his countenance sorely belie him, is capable of worse things than giving false certificates of death; while Gilsland is gone out of the reach of making tardy amends by confession. Before taking any other step I should, were I you, call Mr. Bond into counsel. He will advise as to the likeliest and safest measures. Meanwhile we had best be dumb, and go on as heretofore. We can not challenge Oliver or Lady Georgiana on pure hearsay."

To this every one acceded; and the next morning when Rachel, in most reluctant redemption of her promise, walked up to luncheon at the Hurltemere House, John Withers and Arthur Hill rode over to the old lawyer's at Braferton.

III.

Oliver Warleigh appeared to Rachel Withers very much broken and wasted indeed since she

saw him last in London, though Lady Georgiana protested that he was stronger than he had been for a long while, and in better spirits. He said to her when she went in, wringing her hand with his yellow skeleton fingers as he spoke: "I have had a long agony, Rachel, a very long agony; but something whispers me it is drawing near to an end now."

"You must not give way, sir; there's years of life in you yet," shrilled Mrs. Lupton, who was standing by his chair in the attitude of attentive nurse. He was not deaf, but she always raised her voice as if he were, and stooped her mouth to his ear, from which he visibly recoiled as if he expected her to bite.

Lady Georgiana was seated at her work-table in the window. "He desponds sometimes, Rachel, and it can not be wondered at," said she, looking wearily toward him. She was busy on a fine piece of tapestry, of which she must have had an acre put away somewhere; for it was her constant occupation, and never appeared made up or put to any use. Rachel had never seen her at home that she had not a large square of canvas and a basket of bright wools and silks before her. Who knows how many aching terrors that monotonous labor helped her to smother! She spoke again. "Tell Oliver about your holiday, Rachel; it will divert his mind from dwelling on his own sensations for half an hour and that will be so much gained. You would like to hear what Rachel Withers saw and did abroad, would you not, Oliver?"

He inclined his head in courteous assent, but did not appear to listen after she had spoken a few sentences. It would have had to be a much more vital subject than any traveler's talk to attract his attention away from himself for more than a minute or two now. His eyes fixed themselves on the smouldering logs that heaped the wide range; for he was so chilly in his feebleness that he needed a fire during the hottest days of summer. Perhaps the tone of Rachel's soft voice going on in a continuous strain of chat had a soothing effect, and enabled him to give himself up to his own train of thought more entirely than if he had been addressed at intervals only; so, at least, she fancied from the set quietness that presently stole over his countenance. He seemed rapt away into a world of his own, where his gnawing miseries grew dull and lethargic. He passed whole days now sunk in this semblance of deep reverie, which, if it could have been dived into, would, perhaps, have been found sheer vacancy. Body, mind, and spirit were all alike worn down to the lowest ebb. It seemed as if deliverance by death could not be far distant from him.

While Rachel engaged her master, Mrs. Lupton retired to her own place and took up her sewing with an air of perfect peace and comfort. What a woman that was! Sleek, fair, plump, even comely to the casual glance; but her eyes were hard and cold as steel, and the lines about her mouth might have been carved with the graver instead of by a natural smile. She was a woman who with a purpose to serve would hesitate at no cruelty, no crime, no desperate, long-sustained iniquity, and she looked like what she was.

It was not until Rachel had been full an hour in this room, from which Oliver Warleigh now

rarely stirred save to his bed in that which adjoined it, before luncheon was announced; and then Lady Georgiana and she went down-stairs together, leaving him alone with Mrs. Lupton. Rachel observed that he watched them away, and that his eyes expressed terror of being thus left—the terror of a helpless person abandoned to a torturer.

They sat down to the table by themselves, for Mortimer was not in the house; but he made his appearance before they had finished, announcing as he joined them that he had met Sinclair Ferrand on the moor, and had walked round by the Force with him. His mother received this intelligence calmly, but an awful ghastliness overspread her countenance when her son went on with heedless inobservance to say that Dr. Ferrand and all the Brookfall party were expected at Prior's Bank in a few days—evidently she had not heard a whisper of this before. She felt the net closing round her inevitably now; Rachel averted her gaze from her—great as had been her crime, her cruelty, pity for her was at that moment the uppermost feeling in her mind.

"Why did you not tell me this before?" said Lady Georgiana suddenly in a voice that made her shrink; so forced and yet so stifled with thick thronging agonies. "Why did you not tell me this yesterday when we were speaking of her!" Rachel looked up and their eyes met; and in that instant, though not a word was uttered, a whole revelation was made. There was no longer any secret about Alice as between those two. Lady Georgiana was self-betrayed and she knew it.

Mortimer, startled into attention by his mother's tone and manner, intercepted that swift glance which told so much, but he did not speak. The color fled out of his face too, and he looked from one to the other with vivid, silent inquiry as to what it all meant. Lady Georgiana was the first to recover her composure. "You eat nothing, Rachel," said she, and Rachel as quietly responded that she would not take any thing more, she thanked her. "Are you afraid we shall poison you?" asked Lady Georgiana again, then laughed her harsh laugh which could conceal so much.

They all rose together from the table and passed into the hall, the door of which stood open with the full mid-day glow pouring in on the checkered marble of the floor. Lady Georgiana paused a moment meditative, and then invited Rachel to come out into the garden. "There are peaches ripe on the south-wall," said she; "and they are always best plucked and eaten when the sun is hot upon them." Rachel obeyed her behests, and when she said again, "Take my arm, Rachel," she took it without hesitation.

If any one had warned her beforehand that thus and thus would she behave toward a woman who had been guilty of such stupendous wickedness as had Oliver Warleigh's wife, she would have scouted the accusation vehemently. She could only have imagined herself shrinking away from her with loathing or denouncing her with horror, but the sacredness of suffering humanity was in her still, and that overpowered all sentiments in Rachel's soul but one of awed, wondering compassion. The judgment of God was so

close upon her now that mortal hatred of her guilt shrank away and hid its face from the spectacle of her punishment.

Mortimer followed into the garden and gathered the fruit for them from the sunny wall, and they ate it, walking leisurely to and fro under the hedge of clipped holly that screened the west winds from the lower terrace—ate it, and talked about it as if that dreadful quarter of an hour were a pleasant interval of idleness and nothing more. The heat and glare were, however, very great, and Lady Georgiana proposed by and by that they should go indoors; and leaving Mortimer below they returned to Oliver Warleigh's room. Then again did his wife apply herself mechanically to her tapestry, and again was poor Rachel invited to amuse the invalid with her reminiscences of travel until three o'clock struck, and she could decently take leave. If Lady Georgiana had one doubt of her knowledge left, Rachel wished fervently that she should retain it, and not a single word of explanation or inquiry passed between them to clear up that glance of terrible intelligence they had exchanged.

As Rachel was bidding Oliver Warleigh goodbye, his lips formed the almost soundless words, "John, I want to see John," with low, tremulous, beseeching energy. No one overheard him but herself; for Lady Georgiana and Lupton were at the lower end of the room, as far away from the fire as they could get; a pressure of his hand was the only response she ventured on, but he understood it, and gave her a stealthy gesture of acknowledgment in reply.

Mistress Dobie put herself in the way to have a few words with Rachel as she was leaving the house.

"What do you think of Master Oliver, Miss Rachel? I think he's ower beset wi' doctors an' nurses to ha' half a chance. Poor mortal man! God knows why he is as he is, an' mayhap t' Auld 'Un knows, but nare a ane o' us can guess." The dame peered at Rachel with shrewd intelligence as if, with encouragement, she could have said much more than she did, but Rachel declined to take the hint. It was not likely that Sir Laurence Warleigh's brother could have come to his present mysterious and miserable condition without a world of back-stairs talk and speculation having been lavished upon him; and notwithstanding Mistress Dobie's disclaimer she had a tolerably just suspicion of what had brought it about; she was too shrewd and clear-witted a woman to have lived for eight or ten months in hostility with Mrs. Lupton, and not to have discovered the secret of her power and influence over Lady Georgiana Warleigh.

Rachel met Mortimer loitering near the gate, as she believed on purpose to speak to her, but if so his courage failed him; for though he walked nearly all the way to the rectory with her he never once referred to the scene at luncheon. He looked perplexed and out of spirits; up to that day he had lived without a suspicion, but now he perceived some danger dimly and darkly threatening his mother, but of what nature or whence coming he could not conjecture even yet.

IV.

Mr. Bond was thunderstruck by the communication which John Withers and Arthur Hill

made to him. At first he exclaimed that the story was too wildly improbable to be true, but being reminded that not one of them in Hurtle-dale had seen Annis *dead*—not even himself, though he had gone to Hastings for the very purpose of looking after her and watching that all was right—he began to blame himself and say, how should he answer to his master for his cowardly neglect? But for that, the conspiracy might have been detected at the first step, and those wicked women circumvented. He asked time to consider of the measures that must be taken to verify the story, and promised to go over to the rectory on the following morning after breakfast, and this he did accordingly, arriving there to find confirmation strong of every particular that had been told him on the previous day.

This confirmation had come to Rachel Withers in the shape of a confession written by Mr. Gilsland shortly before his death. He began it by expressing his disappointment at her non-appearance on the Monday according to her promise, and went on in the supposition that she did not intend to redeem it; or that she had left Ostend. It was very brief and very explicit; almost the only novelty in it being the information that the coffin buried in Hurtle-dale churchyard as that of Annis contained no mortal relics at all. There was a touch of grotesque vanity in its conclusion. It was one of his bitterest regrets, he said, that he had made Rachel's life so desolate and wretched. But it never was *desolate* or *wretched*; perhaps she had borne her few trials as lightly as ever a woman in the world; for she had always set herself with pious fortitude to endure what could not be evaded, and it is our struggles that gall us often more than our bonds. She now found herself under the necessity of telling the incidents of her few days at Ostend.

"Poor wretch, and he had not even the consolation of knowing himself not utterly deserted!" remarked Katherine, and no one ever touched on that part of the subject again.

The letter had been detained amongst others and forwarded to Mr. Gilsland's widow; it having, as it appeared, no address upon it when he died and left his work undone. At least it was a feminine hand that had addressed it to Rachel at Claymire, whence Hanson had forwarded it to Hurtle-dale.

"It will prevent a struggle or shorten it at least," remarked Arthur Hill. "I am thankful one of the crew has confessed."

And then, prepared for whatever might occur, John Withers set off to the Hurltemere House for his interview with Oliver Warleigh, and a most sad and terrible interview it was. Lady Georgiana opposed his seeing her husband at first, but when he firmly insisted, she penetrated his designs, lost all self-command, and exclaimed: "Then Rachel Withers has told you her fancies? But she has no proof—I defy any of you to bring evidence against us that will hold water."

John's calmly crushing reply was:

"Lady Georgiana, we need neither proof nor evidence, for you will bring no opposition to bear against the facts. Mr. Gilsland cleansed his conscience before he died by confessing the whole base conspiracy."

"It was *he* betrayed us then, the vaporing, lying wretch! I knew he was not to be trusted, nor Frith either; wild horses would not have dragged it from Lupton or from me!" And for several minutes the baffled woman walked about the room, lost to sense in her rage, grinding her teeth, and uttering the inarticulate animal sounds of a passion and an agony too great for words. With a desperate effort she recovered her self-control at last and stood still, her bosom heaving, her visage livid with suppressed emotion, and said with her sneer of bitterest contempt: "Oliver has had a long hankering to cleanse his conscience too; since that hound has done it, let him have what shred of peace such confession can give him. He would have been beforehand with Gilsland if he had not had me at his elbow all these years to bolster up his courage." And so she led the way to her husband's room at the door of which stood Mrs. Lupton.

"It is over, Lupton. You can do the best that remains for yourself, and go," said Lady Georgiana, addressing the nurse.

Mrs. Lupton stared at her patroness for a moment, horribly dismayed, and then asked: "Who was it told—Frith or Gilsland?" Being informed that it was Mr. Gilsland, she answered, while a significant grin writhed her lips away from her shining teeth: "He is dead already—so much the better for him perhaps." A demon revealed itself in her countenance at that moment; she would not have stuck at murder just then to compass a revenge.

John Withers could not enter the room until she stood away from the door, which she was in no haste to do; her reign of terror was over, but she had too much confidence in her personal resources to beat a cowardly retreat.

"I shall always respect and admire you, Lady Georgiana Warleigh," said she, with a grave assumption that her respect and admiration were desirable things. "You have stood firm from beginning to end—firmer than I looked for; and if there had been only us two in the secret as I proposed, Doomsday might have told a tale, but it would never have got out before." And with that she stepped aside from the doorway and let John pass her.

Oliver Warleigh had been wide awake to the unusual disturbance, and was staring affrighted toward the entrance when John went in—his cowering figure, hands clutching the sides of his chair, and head thrust forward, all hideously expressive of the terror that had laid hold on him. When he saw who his visitor was he fell back and essayed to smile—a feeble, dismal effort that ended in a whining cry.

"I am living in hell, John, I am living in hell, and they have sent for Frith again?" whispered he. "I thought he was come—was it only you talking to Lupton at the door? Keep him away if you can—*she* is always promising to give me a dose when he is here; and she will some day when my lady is out of the way. She uses me shamefully, shamefully! I hate her!" The vehemence of his passion lifted him for a moment erect in his chair, but only to shrink down again more abashed and fear-stricken than ever, as he went on: "You are a good man, John, and can know nothing of the temptations the devil puts in the road of the wicked. If I tell

you what we did many, many years since, you will not be hard on me, will you, though you are a priest?" He waited panting for the assurance, and then went on in a voice so low as to be almost inaudible. "I would have told Laurence when he came home from America, but they took me abroad and shut me up for six years. *His child did not die at Hastings of that fever*; we gut her conveyed away, and in the coffin we buried here there was nothing but a swathed log of wood—if you have it taken up you will find I speak the truth. They say she really is dead now, but they have told me so many lies that may be a lie too. I saw her once in Paris, again in London, and at Claymire last summer, and they swear I was mistaken—but I know better. It was Gipsy and no other."

"Would it be any relief to you to hear that she was not dead?" John asked him.

"I can not tell—it would make Laurence amends. But there is poor Mortimer—he has been brought up to think himself heir to Whinstane and Penslaven—but still, *is she alive*?" John then told him that she was. "Would Laurence know her?" was the next inquiry. John thought it extremely probable he might. "I hated her, the little serpent, but I am glad she is not dead—yes, it is *safest*," replied Oliver. "Mortimer will not take so much harm, for he does not care about money. It is the dishonor, the shame he will feel. My lady says cynically she does not know how we come to have a son so sensitive. They have tried to persuade me that I am *mad*, John; but I have been sane enough not to escape one wrench of the screw they have put upon me!" And thus he moaned on, poor feeble wretch; not too weak to imagine a crime, but ever too weak to act it out; earning for his guerdon in the end nothing but the scorn and tyranny of his mean and miserable associates in guilt. At this moment even he pleaded with John not to betray him to his nurse, lest she should take on him her long-threatened revenge for his suspicion-breeding fears.

John bade him set his mind at rest, and promised that she should molest him no more; the secret had been oozing out for some time and many had guessed it before he spoke. He also told him of Mr. Gilsland's confession, and then he felt rather than heard him ask the question, "Does Laurence know it?" John said No, but he must now be immediately warned and summoned home, whereupon Oliver fell into such a trembling and faintness that John was relieved to see Lady Georgiana enter; rigid, emotionless, as if she were formed compact of ice and iron.

Before she spoke her husband conjectured her design—she was come to tell him they must leave the Hurtlemere House instantly.

"No, no, no!" shrieked he piteously. "I will not go away with Lupton any more; John, stand between me and that fiend."

"Will you remain here and meet your brother Laurence in his own house? Will you dare *that*?" demanded his wife.

"I will dare any thing rather than fall into Lupton's hands away from here," was his reply.

"So be it—what *you* dare, I dare; but it is not wise; it is running more risks than needs."

"Laurence is a good fellow; I was never

afraid of Laurence from a boy. I wish we had never seen that girl—he has behaved better to me than any of you; and I know he loves poor Mortimer."

At these words a spasm of anguish disturbed Lady Georgiana's frozen face, and turning to John, she said,—

"Who will tell him? I can not."

It was a scene of sickening weakness, wickedness, wretchedness. John Withers looked quite ill and worn out when he went home after it, and this was by no means the last act in the pitiful tragedy. What he said to them in his character of priest need not be quoted here; but in his position as kinsman he was kind. Mortimer did not appear so long as he waited; and Mistress Dobie on being inquired of, said she had watched him go over the fell before the rector arrived. He left without seeing him, therefore, and for all that the revelation *must* come, John fancied Lady Georgiana was thankful even for this brief reprieve.

It was a very sad evening at the rectory. Letters were written to Sir Laurence at the Hague, where he was almost sure to go sooner or later, though his exact whereabouts was not known; and in John's was inclosed a copy of Mr. Gilsland's confession. Katherine was exceedingly anxious that Oliver should be moved down to the rectory before Sir Laurence came home; let him have been ever so weak, ever so wicked, he was still a brother, and a brother to all appearance, hanging now on the verge of the grave. John did not gainsay her wishes, and as Arthur Hill and Grace seconded them, it was determined that the proposal of a refuge there should be made to Lady Georgiana. It was impossible that Oliver could travel far in his present condition, and it was equally impossible that he could remain where he was. He could not be left under the roof of his injured brother through the crisis that was now drawing nearer every day.

V.

The family at the rectory were all seated at breakfast the next morning when Mortimer Warleigh was seen to come in at the gate, sauntering and slow as his manner was. Having closed it he stood leaning upon it and looking back up the road by the way he had come for several minutes; then turned along the path to the side-door. John left the table to go to him, and for the next ten minutes after the library door was heard to close upon them, the rest of the party sat almost without a word, hushed and anxious waiting for the issue. At the end of that time the two reappeared in the garden, John without his hat, holding the young man's arm and speaking to him with grave earnestness. Grace watched them through the window, her mild eyes brimming with tears, and Katherine covered her face to hide hers.

"It will fall very cruelly upon him," remarked Arthur Hill; and the young folks stared and marveled and held their peace, impressed most deeply as the young always are by the sense of a surrounding atmosphere of trouble when they do not understand whence it arises. At length the two in the garden parted; Mortimer went off at his leisurely pace, and John returned sadly to the breakfast-room.

"How does the poor fellow bear it?" said Arthur Hill as his brother-in-law reappeared; the women with their eyes mutely asking the same.

"It is hard to judge. He says nothing—he seems stunned," was the answer. "Mortimer has a high mind—it is the fraud, the hideous disgrace that touch him; not the loss of money or of position." Katherine asked if her husband had had to tell him the story or only to confirm it. "Only to confirm it," he replied. "Lady Georgiana spoke to him last night, and Lupton added her testimony. That woman has not left the Hurtlemere House yet."

"Did you tell Mortimer that we wish him to come down here with his father and mother, John? If not I shall go up myself," said Katherine. John remonstrated faintly, but his wife repeated her determination. "Yes—Grace and I will walk up after prayers. We shall put them all somewhere. The boys may sleep at the Force Farm till they go back to school; Mary Wray will take care of them; and when Rachel goes to Prior's Bank her room will be at liberty." It sounded strange, these trivial domestic arrangements coming athwart such serious events—but it is always thus in common life.

And about midway the morning Katherine and Grace did go up to the Hurtlemere House, and settled every thing to their satisfaction. Oliver Warleigh acceded to their proposal eagerly, whispering to Katherine that she must not offer to take in his nurse, as he could do perfectly well without her; he did not seem to be suffering much in any way that day; whether he felt that the worst was over, and was rallying against it, or whether he was growing too weak to be any longer shaken by pangs of human fear, was not easy to tell. He looked like a man who has finished a tremendous task or put off a heavy burden, and was now preparing to enjoy rest. After the long and terrible disquietudes he had borne, his present position must have been one of comparative ease and comfort. Natures of his base sort suffer more from the dread of discovery and the penalties of guilt than from the inward conscience.

It was not thus with Lady Georgiana. She sat like a statue, defying fate, not conquered by it. She had told all to her favorite son, and he had not reproached her. He had made no complaint; he had not uttered one harsh or unkindly word; he had not given her one cold or angry look, and yet she knew he was lost to her love forever. If this cruel woman cherished any thing it was Mortimer—the only plea she had for her crime was that she did it to advance him; and if he abandoned her in her disgrace, she would suffer with tenfold bitterness the anguish of bereavement that she had callously inflicted on poor little Gipsy and her father a dozen years before.

The facts could not be long in getting abroad now; as soon as the rectory received its unhappy guests, Mistress Dobie would have leisure to carry her gossip to market. There were a thousand revelations in her wrinkled sagacious visage that morning, but no one invited her to talk. She only delivered herself of one remarkable criticism on the obnoxious nurse whose reign she perceived was over. "There is, ma'am," said she, addressing Katherine, "brass

enough in that woman's face to make a warming-pan;" and she appeared to derive an exquisite additional satisfaction from the utterance of it, when she became aware that Mrs. Lupton was behind her and had overheard it.

Two days after this Rachel Withers prepared to move to Prior's Bank. She had seen Sinclair Ferrand, who had begged her to be there when his aunts and Alice arrived with the doctor. She was nothing loth, though it was something of a trial too, to enter as guest those familiar rooms that had so long been home. Before she left the rectory, John agreed with her that he would come to Prior's Bank the next day, and lay before the doctor and his son all the discoveries that had been made affecting Alice, and after that they might judge how far the intelligence need go before Sir Laurence arrived at the Hurtlemere House. Every body in the secret now thought it would be best and safest to withhold it from her until her father was present to reclaim her.

CHAPTER THE SECOND.

ALICE IN HURTLEDALE.

Old faces glimmered through the doors,
Old footsteps trod the upper floors,
Old voices called her from without.—TENNYSON.

I.

THE travelers arrived at Prior's Bank about six o'clock, all much tired, and not entirely exempt from those little infirmities of temper which a long journey through a sultry summer's day is apt to stir up. But Sinclair soon smoothed the ruffled plumes of the elder ladies, and Alice's wanted no smoothing; for she was as bright as a humming-bird, and beautifully, frankly happy at seeing him again. As for the doctor, the height of his disturbance never reached beyond the comfort of a classical quotation, and when the party sat down to dinner all the cares of the world might have been banished a hundred miles off for any appearance they made at the board.

Miss Delia had quite recovered from her disinclination to the journey. "It is very pleasant dining with Sinclair in his own house after all, and this is excellent lamb, my dear," said she, nodding her cap toward her nephew with great benignity. "And how are you getting on, Sunshine? remember you ate nothing at luncheon. It is many, many years since pleasure and excitement took away *my* appetite—a little more mint sauce, if you please; thank you. Yes, take care of her, Sinclair; I give her into *your* charge here. As I tell her, it is impossible to live without eating."

Alice blushed and laughed at her aunt Delia's prosaic remarks, and then Miss Flora had her little unconscious revelation to make of how Sunshine had been in the clouds for a week, and, in consequence, the very worst of company to them at Brookfall. Rachel Withers suggested that she had perhaps been scribbling another fairy fantasia, but Sinclair looking at her merrily, read "No" in her clear candid eyes. Say that she had been in dreamland, sheenland, love-land, dreaming of him, who will assert but that she had her right to dream?

There was light enough when dinner was over,

to go out into the garden, and even to see the beauty of the surrounding country in the maize-colored and purple tints of twilight and moonlight mellow and mingled. The lawn had been newly mown in the morning, and was as smooth and even as the turf of the Claymire downs; so there staid the doctor, smoking his after-dinner cigar, and there staid the aunts with Rachel, though chary of possible dew's attending the nightfall. By the river under the ash-trees they could see now and then the figures of Sinclair and Alice passing to and fro. Miss Delia remarked once that they did not seem to have much to say to each other, but perhaps the silence of bappy lovers is as sociable. Her fluency, however, fatigue had by no means diminished. She had a hundred and fifty things to talk of, each one more trivial than the other; but in her moods of excitement the excellent old lady, like many virtuous persons of her sex, always prattled fastest. Rachel was her patient listener.

First she reviewed the daily life at Claymire since Rachel left it; enlarging on the delinquencies of a scapegrace little scholar in her class at the school, and devoutly hoping that no greater harm than ordinary would befall him in her absence. Then she expatiated on the propriety and expedience of Mr. Clarke, the curate, seeking him a wife to replace his sister in the parish; for she was going to marry. "A sensible, staid, active woman, something like yourself he should choose, Rachel," she was pleased to say; to which Rachel replied that he would show very little judgment if he selected a wife of *her* years when there were nice girls to be had for the asking. Next a remark Miss Flora made on the excellence of the peas she had eaten at dinner, sent her sister off on the subject of marrow-fats, and of kitchen-garden produce in general; thence to the kitchen-garden of Prior's Bank in particular; its aspect, its situation, its productiveness, and its liability to visitations from frogs and toads by reason of its proximity to the river. The allusion to amphibious vermin abbreviated the walk. Miss Delia observed that this was the time of night for them to come out, therefore *she* should go in; and as she was not disposed for solitude it became necessary that Miss Flora and Rachel Withers should go in too.

Trivial talk is supposed to be very wearisome when the mind is heavy with serious thoughts, but it rather relieved Rachel to witness the old lady's buoyant mood, and to listen to her choicest prattle. Lulls and lulls are good for all of us in the intervals between exciting events. It would kill us to be always at high pressure of excitement whether of joy or sorrow; and during the last few weeks, Rachel had been terribly strung up. She wisely let herself go now, and rested on Miss Delia's chat as on a wholesome mental and moral relaxation; and it was decidedly refreshing in its effects.

"I begin to think we shall enjoy our visit here very much, sister Flo," recommenced the old lady, appropriating to herself with a sigh of exceeding comfort what had been Mrs. Sara Grandago's favorite easy chair. "It is nice to see where our dear child is to make her home; the only drawback is that it is so far away from Brookfall. But they will visit us every year — only to think of it! Sinclair looks very proud and happy — cunning fellow, imagine, Rachel,

that he has had his eye on Sunshine ever since he grew up! He never had a suspicion of Mr. More — I do not dare to fancy what he might have done had he found out while it was going on! And I need not have worried myself about that beautiful young Warleigh — it seems she only mixed him up in some wonderful way with her vagaries about her childhood before she came to us. I was really afraid at one time she was going to be fond of him, and he would never have suited us. I object to weak men; if a woman can not rest in implicit reliance on her husband, my feeling is, that she would be better without one. Now, I consider Sinclair a very fine character — plenty of moral bone and muscle about him; but in Mortimer Warleigh it had all run to sentiment."

"Did you perceive a shade of anxiety in Sinclair's countenance, when he first met us, Delia dear?" asked Miss Flora at the earliest pause in her sister's rivulet of talk. "It soon disappeared when he looked at Sunshine, but I almost began to fear there might be something amiss."

No, Miss Delia had observed nothing but what was perfectly delightful; she had never seen Sinclair appear to greater advantage in his life; she should have considered it a very poor compliment had he looked glum when he was welcoming them to his house for the first time, especially when his father was there and dear Alice; how could sister Flo fancy such a thing?

It was not difficult to understand how sister Flo had fancied it. Sinclair had been looking very grave and thoughtful — even oppressed — for the last few days. With Alice's vagaries, as he had considered them, strong in his mind, he had heard one or two of the wild stories then circulating about the dales concerning the Oliver Warleighs and Sir Laurence's lost daughter; and adding them together with the almost inevitable interpretation, he began to see changes awaiting his Sunshine, and shoals of kinsfolk ready to claim her. He was very well contented with things as they were; he did not desire a division and sub-division of her affections; he would have preferred to keep them all to himself. Perhaps a little cloud of doubt and uncertainty beset his own prospects in the anticipation of what was coming, but Alice's radiant face effectually dispersed it, and when he sat by her at dinner there was not a shadow remaining. Before a real and present love like hers all manner of anxieties fell effaced. Let come what might of external changes her faithful heart for him would never change!

When the doctor's cigar was smoked out, he stopped through the glass-door and joined his sisters, and soon after came in the two young ones; she with a damask rose in her hair, and a soft, happy light shining in her eyes. She did not look like lost Gipsy now. The berry-brown skin of that sun-burnt darling was no longer hers; but a warm, creamy tint, into which melted a pure, healthy blush on either rounded cheek. Her movements had acquired a new, unconscious grace; she was always an affectionate, caressing creature, but hitherto she had certainly worn her mad cap rather airily; for the present, however, she seemed to have laid it aside, and taken on wearing in its stead the coif of maidenly dignity; and the one suited her even more charmingly than the other.

She sang several of the doctor's favorite

songs in her sweet flute-like voice, and Sinclair stood by looking and listening in a trance of delight. His aunt Delia addressed him thrice in vain, and indemnified herself for his uncivil absence of mind by remarking audibly, "He is in the clouds now, I suppose; it is a merciful provision of Providence that we are not all there together."

Alice overheard her through the symphony of one of her ballads, and glancing round with a rosy smile, whispered, "Sinclair, auntie Dee is speaking to you;" when the absent lover came back to himself and said, "It was divine!" but what was divine, whether the song, or his own reverie, or Miss Delia's voice, did not clearly appear.

After dark it came on to rain, softly, but with an even-downo pertinacity that threatened continuance. It would be a pity, Rachel Withers said, if the weather broke up now; for half the beauty of Hurdendale was in the sun, and it would be disappointing if Alice did not see it at its best. So it would, all agreed, but then nobody could bespeak fine weather!

II.

The first person Rachel saw on coming downstairs next morning was Alice, leaning her forehead against the window-glass and watching with disconsolate eyes the slow trickling of the rain-drops down the streaming pane. She was in the morning-room alone, and as Rachel joined her she turned round and said: "This is going to be a thorough wet day, Rachel, is it not?"

"Yes," replied Rachel, imitating her aggrieved tone; and looking out she saw that woods, river, moor, fells, were all wiped away from the landscape as by a sponge of dense gray mist. It certainly was unlucky — they could not even see the limits of the lawn; and the roses on the verandah hung their drowned heads down heavy and hopeless. It had not ceased raining for a minute throughout the night.

"Is it often like this at Prior's Bank?" Alice asked again. Rachel told her no; she thought the fog must have come on for pure perversity; for, in fact, Hurdendale was much less troubled with fogs than was Claymire with sea-mist. This comforted her a little and she came away from the dispiriting window.

"You must make acquaintance with indoors," suggested Rachel, and at that her countenance brightened altogether.

"It is really prettier than Brookfall, Rachel, though I would not grieve auntie Dee by allowing her to suppose I thought so," said she, with natural cheerfulness. "Sinclair tells me he has made no material alterations — do you see any changes?"

"No — he has left them for your taste to direct." Rachel preferred to talk of the future rather than of the past just now; she did not like to think of kind old Bittersweet when this young generation was taking possession of her abdicated house.

They had not been many minutes alone when Sinclair looked in at the door, and holding out his hand to Alice bade them come to breakfast; the aunts and doctor were already there. It is an old-fashioned custom, that of offering the hand to conduct a lady, but there is more of grace and courtesy in it than in offering the arm,

or the elbow, as some men do. And the pretty way in which Alice gave him hers! If the ghost of Bittersweet, who held to all ancient politenesses, could have seen her at that moment, it would have smiled on her benignant for the admiration its original had of simple, easy, modest manners!

The weather did not clear. They watched it through breakfast, and they watched it after breakfast, but still down came the rain with a vicious, steady, unwearying persistence. The doctor betook himself to the library, and the ladies retired to the morning-room, where some of them worked and some of them made believe to work, while Sinclair read aloud to them that famous dissertation of Elia's on roast-pig, which is more delicious than the tenderest suckling that ever made its last public appearance sheathed in crisp brown armor of crackling. But on that point, of course, opinions might differ. Miss Delia, though no epicure, confessed to a weakness for the real thing, even while mentioning that it always suggested to her *baked baby* — and witness the singular connection of ideas! Charles Lamb never meant that exquisite humorous chapter to transport its readers to the remote Fiji Islands, but it did so, and left them stranded there, bemoaning the evil practices of the cannibals until only Miss Delia and Rachel were left to bemoan. Miss Delia petted the unsavory subject, and dived into deep speculations on what doleful stories the first missionaries who went thither to reform the taste of the inhabitants might have told if they would; until they heard from the adjoining room a swift chromatic scale followed up by a spirited waltz. This sufficiently betrayed the whereabouts of Sunshine and Sinclair, and Miss Flora having mentioned something about a letter to cook at home had no doubt retired to write it beyond the scent of the Fiji ovens.

Rachel rendered herself up an unwilling sacrifice for an hour or more, longing and yet trembling for her brother John's arrival. He came about eleven o'clock, and having inquired first for her, was introduced into the room where she sat with Miss Delia alone. He handed her a letter, and then gave her the opportunity of reading it undisturbed by taking the old lady to talk to meanwhile. It was from Sir Laurence Warleigh, written at Leyden, whence he was going to the Hague two days later; and at the Hague, he said, letters would find him till the month's end. By this date, therefore, he had probably received the copy of Mr. Gilsland's confession and the letters that accompanied it; and if so, he might be in Hurdendale on the day after the morrow.

Rachel sat quiet for a minute or two after she had read it, listening to the waltz-music that flowed from Alice's deft and rapid fingers, and thinking what extremes meet in this strange world of ours, until John intimated to her that he wished to pay his respects to Doctor Ferrand on his arrival in the dale — Sinclair he had seen once already. Miss Delia parted with her new acquaintance cordially, and Rachel herself was bidden to usher him into the library, where the doctor was supposed to be. The room was empty, however, when they entered it, so she rang the bell, and asked the servant who answered it to seek both the gentlemen; then sat down with

her brother, and endured a few very agitated moments in contemplation of the interview that was about to take place.

Rachel Withers always connected the telling of Annis's story afterward with the scent of white moss roses; for the library was fragrant with them, newly gathered the day before. She would fain have left John to get through it by himself, but this he would not permit for he rightly conjectured that there would be a hundred slight details asked for that only she could give. The glass-door was shut, but it looked out on a pretty shady nook of the garden with beech-trees encircling it and a basket of scarlet geraniums in the center of the grass-plot. She made conversation about those geraniums with a view of steadying her nerves; but the faster she talked the more excited she grew, and soon she reached that point when she did not know what she was saying. How she envied people who were always masters of their parts of speech! John was strung up too; the irrelevance of his replies to her prattle betrayed it. He did not like his task, which yet must be done; and by and by they dropped into silence—the silence of waiting and expectancy, than which there are few states of being more thoroughly trying and uncomfortable.

The doctor had had courage to turn out in the rain, and a fine gleam having made itself apparent just at the moment when Rachel and her brother passed from the morning room to the library, Alice and Sinclair had taken immediate advantage of it to sally forth too; but the servant sent in quest of them found them all in the garden, and in about ten minutes the doctor came in by the glass door with his son close behind him. John Withers was introduced to his father by Sinclair, and after a few every-day expressions of courtesy the group subsided into chairs, all but Rachel, who continued standing and looking very helpless.

"I hope there is nothing amiss, my dear?" said the cordial old doctor; "pray sit down—you are as white as a ghost."

It would have relieved her inexpressibly had she possessed the vanishing powers of one!

Sinclair perceived that something very serious was in the wind, and took his seat in silence at the farther side of the library table, upon which he leant his arms, drawing toward him the perfumy bowl of white roses, over which he bent his face while watching Rachel with shrewd scrutiny. He had a good guess what was coming.

She could never afterward recall the exact terms with which John approached his subject, but she knew there was confusion and iteration in his beginning, and that after a few seconds of patient listening the doctor crossed his legs, leant back in his chair and took a pinch of snuff, while Sinclair pushed away the roses and woke up into keen and vivid interest. And at last it was all out. She heard John say, with that peculiar muffled indistinctness that clothes the sounds heard between sleeping and waking, "It is beyond a doubt that Alice is Sir Laurence Warleigh's daughter, Dr. Ferrand. We have every proof of it. His brother and his brother's wife admit the fact, and we have besides the written confession of Mr. Gilsland, from whom your most excellent sisters received her, and who was one of the chief agents in her abduction."

Then Rachel seemed to be suddenly roused to a clear comprehension of all that was passing, and Sinclair, upon whom *certainly* came with a shock, notwithstanding all his previsions, sprang up impetuous, exclaiming: "And Sunshine's *delusions* are *truths*? It was no idle caprice that turned her with such fear and loathing from Lady Georgiana Warleigh and attracted her with such a tantalizing curiosity toward Mortimer."

"Let us hear the particulars, Sinclair," interposed the doctor, cutting short his energetic speech; "and close that window—we left her about the garden somewhere, and she had better not come in here just now."

The window was shut, and that commonplace measure of precaution seemed to sober the whole party down into self-possession. John drew an audibly long breath, and Rachel tried to clear her head by pushing the hair away from her brow with tremulous cold hands. The doctor bade her not get excited if she could help it.

"I have always suspected that Gilsland knew more about the child than he chose to tell," said he, "but this revelation certainly comes upon me as a surprise. Let us see the confession—let us have it read out. Eh, Sinclair, my boy, this makes a new chapter in your romance—I wish it may have a good ending."

"It can make no difference between Alice and me, sir," replied the young man, calmly drawing back the white roses.

Then John Withers having produced the document, the doctor read it without interruption, his comment at the conclusion being,

"That is as complete and foul a bit of villainy as ever came within the scope of my knowledge."

"What my darling must have suffered!" muttered Sinclair passionately, his face kindling with indignation.

"And the principal actors in the crime are not publicly unmasked yet?" said the doctor.

"There are many innocent persons to be considered," replied John. "We wait for Sir Laurence—even to him the recovery of his daughter can not be all joy, seeing it will reveal the long-continued treachery of his brother."

Sinclair now moved toward the glass door, but his father stretched out a hasty hand to arrest him; had he not been withheld, he would have sought Alice there and then to comfort her for all sorrows past and gone with the good news.

"Wait awhile—let us consider the ways and means, my boy," said the kind old doctor. "There are your aunts to be thought of—Alice's great gain will look at first sight to them a great loss, I sadly fear."

Thus admonished, Sinclair put a restraint upon himself; but though he did not follow the promptings of his tender impatience, he watched the garden closely that he might see the light of his eyes if she chanced to flit round that way, and so full was he of his thoughts of her sweet self, that he did not hear one half of the details now given to the doctor by John Withers and Rachel. Perhaps the main feeling in his heart was that, let her be whose child she might, she was his own dear love and troth-plighted darling beyond the power of all the fathers in Christendom to divide them.

The result of further debate was that Alice

should not be told the truth until Sir Laurence arrived in Hurtleedale, and that the good old aunts should be spared the pains of expectation too—there could not be long to wait for the end now. Just when they had arrived at this conclusion, the servant announced luncheon, and they all passed into the dining-room together; talking as airily as they could of the things of every day; the doctor with full success, but Rachel with a conspicuous absence of even common-sense. The other two were midway between the extremes.

The sky had brightened at noon and given some hope of a fine after part to the day; but the hope in an hour or so proved fallacious; the clouds came over again thicker and blacker than ever, and the pelting rain lashed violently against the windows, causing the doctor to remark that he did not envy John his walk home to the rectory.

"I must ask you to give me shelter until my wife and sister-in-law come down in the carriage this afternoon to pay you a visit of neighborly courtesy—then they will carry me back dry," said John, appealing to Miss Flora and Miss Delia, who bowed, smiled, and looked pleased at the very prompt civility of Hurtleedale—not that it was always so prompt by any means.

In readiness for the anticipated call, the two old ladies betook themselves to the drawing-room afterward, and there sat in state with their prettiest pieces of company-work displayed. Alice also was exhorted to employ herself becomingly, and this she did with a volume of Bon Gaultier's Ballads; edifying their serenities every now and then with some grotesque parody of serious sentiment that especially tickled her sense of fun. Miss Delia Ferrand did not think her cousin Sara's stand of favorite books in a corner of this room, which Sinclair had left precisely as it was, at all well selected for a Christian gentlewoman; for the library she was not responsible—that was the collection of generations; but for her pet volumes—let any body look at them! Not a *good* book amongst them!

They had to play a rather tedious game of patience before Katherine and Grace appeared, but about half-past four a carriage was heard driving round to the door, and a minute afterward they presented themselves, splendid in garb and card-case in hand, as if this were a mere formal ceremony like any other first visit to new settlers in the dale. What born actresses most women are! Rachel knew by herself what Kate must be feeling, and she watched her anxiously, but could not for the life of her detect that her countenance changed by a single shade when Alice was introduced to her. The sisters had expected John's report of their new niece before encountering the ordeal of a meeting, but his remaining at Prior's Bank had left them without that help; nevertheless, they looked her full in the face, and inclined their heads with smiling pleasantness; and then they sat and talked of the weather, of this, of that, of the other, of every insipidity that enters into the dull conversational mosaic of a morning call, with admirable ease and self-possession. They were for the first five minutes six women together, but presently in came Sinclair, and

after him John and the doctor, and then the chat ran, if not more fluently, at all events, more variously. Katherine then took an opportunity of drawing near to Alice, but even then the shrewdest observer would not have detected any special interest in her air or tone. Even John looked at her astonished and perplexed.

Sunshine was her perfect self. Her manner was very quiet and composed on ordinary occasions, and this seemed to her no more. Mrs. Withers and Mrs. Hill were two quite indifferent names to her ears—had they been announced as Katherine and Grace Warleigh there would have been a show of far greater interest. Strangers did not flurry or abash her; she thought too little of herself to be shy, therefore Katherine saw her and read her for what she was. Miss Delia had taken possession of Grace, whose blue mild eyes would now and then wander to where Alice and her sister sat, and then her mind wandered too from the old lady's tedious ditty of her journey, to poor little, long-lost Gipsy, sitting there in the midst of them, so fair and maidenly, and utterly unconscious of the interest circling closer and closer around her.

The visit passed off without incident, and the very brief opportunity Rachel had of a private word with her sister-in-law, she of course availed herself to ask how she liked Alice. Katherine gave her a rueful look and a quite womanish answer. "If she were a seraph I could not be glad to acknowledge her Laurence's child yet—oh! there's a world of trouble to come! But she is beautiful, lovely; I quite exonerate you from any charge of dullness in not recognizing her before; I could look at her for a month without finding in her any trace of resemblance to Annis. Gipsy was almost as dark and rough as a real gipsy. It will be rather hard on Laurence to offer him this fair, dainty, princess-like damsel for a daughter in lieu of his little passionate unkempt wildling. If she be like any of the family it is Lady Foulis—she is quite as tall and has her air. She is not in the least what I pictured her to myself. Her lover will be a man after Laurence's own heart from the look of him—I wish for all our sakes Mortimer stood in his shoes!"

"Quite, quite vain to wish *that*," responded Rachel; and then they parted, and the carriage drove away, and Sunshine summoned Rachel to hear the conclusion of a merry ballad which their arrival had interrupted.

On their homeward road, John gave his wife and Grace an account of his critical interview with the doctor and his son; and explained how Alice and the aunts were to be kept in ignorance of it until Sir Laurence came back from abroad, and was on the spot to reclaim his child without any long agony of waiting and suspense.

"I saw she did not know the moment I saw her—we were speculating all the way to Prior's Bank whether you would have told her or not," said Grace.

"Of course I left that for her present guardians to decide," replied John. "What good people they are, and how good they have been to her! I fancied once or twice I detected in her bits of Gipsy as she used to be."

"Did you—I did not," said his wife. "I was

afraid Laurence would never know her again. Perhaps he may."

"I hope so—how will he feel it, I wonder? I wish Bond could intercept him in London, and travel down with him. I can not imagine to myself what will be his mode of action at all—how he will deal with Oliver and the rest."

Neither could Katherine nor Grace, though they might be supposed to know their brother best. When Sir Laurence returned from America the year after his child's reputed death, he went out into the churchyard with Katherine, and read the inscription on the memorial stone which had replaced the cedar he had planted on Helena's grave; and after speaking a little of Annis's affectionate ways and great fondness for himself, he said he ought never to have let her leave him. And from that day to this no one had ever heard him mention the names of either wife or child again.

III.

The following day rose fine after the heavy rain, and all the landscape showed exquisitely fresh, bright, and beautiful. Alice walked into the garden before breakfast with the doctor to and fro the wild-flower bank, and came in looking like a rose of May, as Miss Delia poetically expressed it. The old lady had quite come out in the way of compliments since she arrived in the north, and had a pleasant word for every body.

Immediately after prayers were over, Sunshine donned her hat for a ramble on the moors—nothing less would content her; so Sinclair acquiesced and proposed a round by which the old Hurltemere House would be avoided.

"We will go over the fell toward Mirkdale and show her our grandest view, and home by the Force and the high beck," said he. "You will come with us, Miss Withers, and you, sir?" to his father; "but the distance would be too great for my aunts." They agreed that it would, and preferred besides a quiet morning indoors; therefore they were left to keep each other company, and the rest set forth in search of the picturesque.

There was a delicious breeze blowing on the fell, quite as sweet as if sharper than the air on the Claymire downs; but here all was more rugged; stronger in color, in form, and in whatever constitutes the distinctive character of scenery. They went high up on the hill, and then turned off by a path through the heather toward a cairn that marked the topmost point of Hurtlefell, whence they could see outspread below them all the glowing panorama of Mirkdale. In all the range of the world there can be no more truly satisfying prospect to heart and eye than one of our English valleys when the time is tending toward harvest; when the meadows, lately mown, lie green as emerald along the marge of the rivers, and the sloping cornlands further up are changing to gold and burnished brown in the fervent August sun. Standing by the cairn with the waves of heather around them, and big gray rocky boulders rising out of the purple sea, in the midst of the silence of the hills—which is a silence such as there is none other—they cried one and all that not any part of their holiday-tour had shown them a lovelier, happier scene than this unsung valley at home!

After her first impulsive words of delight, Alice was peculiarly quiet in her admiration and enjoyment of it; she thoroughly appreciated and felt the charm of fine scenery; but she never worked off her sentiment in the exclamatory fashion. Those who did not know her might think her apathetic; but those who did, one glance at the glow and expression of her face was enough to convince of her enthusiasm. She would sit silent for an hour sometimes, brooding over the features of a beautiful landscape; and to her, as to all the true lovers of nature, the familiarity of a place only enhanced its attraction; often as she had wandered round about Claymire, neither sea, nor downs, nor shore, nor green luxuriant glen, looked to her eyes ever twice the same.

They sat down at the foot of the cairn for a long time, and Rachel acted as guide to point out the special objects of interest in the dale below. Penslaven Castle stood out on the horizon with more than common distinctness, and Whinstane Tower showed itself faintly against a dusk background of wood to those who knew just where to look for it—only to herself, that is. Sinclair betrayed no interest in these places that Rachel could perceive; he was almost as silent as Alice, though probably less absorbed in admiring contemplation. Perhaps he was meditating on the new interest that was coming into her life—perhaps he was even doubting whether or not it might interfere with his own claims. His character was generous; he would rather have her with no other dower but her beauty and her sunshine, than dowered with all these rich possessions which must eventually become hers. He loved her for herself, and felt as if she belonged to him of right more than to any other; and, her promise given, she did.

When they had gazed their fill from this point of the moors, they proceeded for nearly two miles in a direct line on the high level until they reached the Force, and here occurred the event of the day. When Sinclair Ferrand had settled their route so very carefully to exclude the Hurltemere House, it had struck Rachel, though she said nothing, that if Mary Wray happened to be about the farm-yard, feeding her poultry, pigs, or other dependents, they should in fact run greater risk from her than from the bleak gray outside walls of Gipsy's old home; and so it really turned out. Dicky and Andrew were sleeping at the farm now, to leave room at the rectory for the Oliver Warleighs; and it appeared that they found enough amusement about the place to like breakfasting there as well; for they were presiding over the maneuvers of a sturdy, shaggy colt which the rough rider was breaking in when Sinclair opened the gate for the party to pass through the farm-yard after leaving the Force. The two boys were perched on the half-door of the barn, looking on in glee and security; and it would hardly have been like Dicky had he not hailed his new friend Sinclair Ferrand to stop and witness the fun.

Whether there was any vein of recollection in Alice's mind connected with the place, Rachel could not tell, but she gazed wistfully about her, and then sat down on the mounting steps against the house-wall close by the back door, apparently as well pleased to see the tough, self-willed little colt broken-in as the boys themselves. Rachel,

on the contrary, did not like the struggles and kickings and crackings of the whip inevitable to the disciplinary process, and therefore she went round into Mary Wray's pretty span of a garden in front of the house, which was always in summer a perfect nest of flowers.

She had not been there more than five minutes enjoying the brightness and fragrance of some old-fashioned red and purple double stocks when Mary Wray, with a face as white as the apron with which she was hurriedly wiping the suds of the wash-tub from her stout arms, looked out of the house, and vehemently heckoned Rachel to go to her. Rachel guessed what had come to pass. Mary drew her into the best parlor, fragrant of roses and sweet-brier which filled a china bowl on the table, and having shut to the door, faced her almost fiercely, saying in a low voice, but a voice full of conviction,

"Miss Rachel, who's yon i' the broad brown hat sittin' o' the steps i' the yard? She's ta'en her hat off to make hersen a fan of it, and there sits Sir Laurence Warleigh's ain bairn as sure as I am a living woman! If I rive that coffin out o' th' ground wi' my ain hands it sal be done! There was nare a speck or a spot upo' all her fair body where th' sun had na' touched it, but token or no token, I know her as I nursed at my breast when the Lord he took my ain babe, an' all the dale sal know her too or ever I be a day aulder. You'll tell me, Miss Rachel, is yon Miss Annis come back?"

Evasion would have been here equally unfeeling and unwise; Rachel therefore said that it was Annis and no other, on which Mary burst into a passion of tears, dropped into a chair, and flung her apron over her head to cry unseen, rocking herself to and fro and sobbing at intervals—"My puir lost bairn, my ain lost bairn!" until it made Rachel almost weep for sympathy to see her. When at last she uncovered her face, her first question was, did Sir Laurence know? Rachel told her that by that time he did, and was now no doubt hastening home to reclaim his child. She then gave her to understand that she would distress and injure many did she publish her discovery before his arrival, and promised if she would come down to Prior's Bank in the afternoon and inquire for her, she would tell her the whole tragical history. Mary promised, and Rachel then made her escape, dreading every moment lest the boys should come round into the house and surprise her in her unwonted agitation. It seemed singular that Mary should recognize in an instant the likeness of poor Gipsy in Alice when Katherine and Grace could detect no trace of her, and Rachel hardly. Perhaps her relation to the child as foster-mother quickened her natural instinct; and it was an augury that Sir Laurence himself might not find a perfect stranger in his daughter.

About four o'clock of the afternoon Mary Wray came down to Prior's Bank in a state of eager, affectionate excitement and longing to see her nursing again. She had dressed herself in her Sunday best and put on her most formal face to pass through the scrutiny of the servants' hall, but when she was safe in the privacy of Rachel's room, with the door locked to prevent interruptions, she broke out weeping for joy, and it was some time before she was calm enough to listen to the tale she was trembling

with anxiety to hear. But when Rachel began she listened breathlessly, every now and then venting her indignation, pity or surprise in low-voiced, intense ejaculations.

"Didn't I allus tell folks she hadn't fair play!" she said appealingly, when Rachel had made an end of the first part of her story. "That Lady Georgiana is a had lot, an' I care na who hears me say it! For that matter I ha' said it oft enew afore this for all t' world to know."

She then allowed Rachel to proceed, and when she heard how poor Gipsy had been found in the storm on the down by Sinclair Ferrand and taken in at Brookfall, her tears burst out again and she cried, "Oh! but there was angels on earth yet an' suldn't she like to kiss that young tyke who was so good to her bairn!" Rachel told her she had seen him in the farm-yard with her that morning, to which she replied, "I took no heed to him—none. My eyes was fastened on her that I couldna' get 'em awa'. It didn't come upon me wi'out a sort o' warning, though it came sudden. Mistress Dobie, an' Lucy Robb, an' me, we've oft got talking about her lately, an' Mistress Dobie allus persisted i' saying how strange it was as them White Hands hadn't blessed th' innocent bairn if she was to be ta'en awa'; an' ane night Mathew, he'd been reading in a book o' 't master's how a bairn that had been hidden fra his family's gret enemy an' counted for dead years an' years i' them long ago times o' civil war, turned up again when peace came an' was ca'ed ever after t' Shepherd Lord. An' Lucy Robb says, for she fond o' a romance is Lucy, 'What if our Miss Annis had been put out o' t' road like yon?' an' Mathew too, he said as there had been more unlikely things heard tell on, not a hunder miles fra Hurtleedale. An' that set us reckoning he guessed somewhat, but we could nane on us get him to speak plain out. We didn't forget his words tho', and sin' there's been such strange goings on at t' auld Hurtlemere House wi' yon Dr. Frith, an' nurse Lupton, as was regular tyrants over Master Oliver an' Lady Georgiana, Mistress Dobie has got an inkling o' many queer things."

When Rachel had quite finished her narrative Mary gave audible thanks to God that the wicked were discomfited, and then begged that she might be brought to a sight of her darling if it were only for a single instant. "Let me ha' ane glint o' her bonny face afore I go, Miss Rachel," she pleaded with tears in her eyes and voice. "I'll not speak a word an' when I get home I'll shut myself up out o' folk's way lest I suld be tempted to prate o' my gret joy."

Rachel had not the heart to say her nay and yet her request was not easy to grant. In the first place she did not know Sunshine's whereabouts, and in the second she feared that as Mary had recognized her at a glance so also might she recognize Mary; and though the end could not be far off now, yet it would be safest to keep her in peace until the happiness of regaining her father could be at once perfected by his presence. However, as Mary was in no haste to return home, Rachel kept her there in her room until the dressing-bell rang, and a minute or two after came Alice's light step past her door. She then bade Mary place herself away from the window and as much in the shade as

she could, promising to call Gipsy in as she went by again on her way down-stairs; and this she did, making a pretense that she wanted one of her bracelets linking.

Alice entered without observing Mary's retired figure, clad all in white, with a cluster of scarlet geraniums and some light drooping ferns in her hair. Her dress, high to the throat and long to the wrists, yet defined a perfectly graceful, girlish form, and her face had the lustre and freshness of youth and beauty at their best and their brightest.

The bracelet fastened, Rachel said thanks to dismiss her; but instead of going she stood still, and looked straight into the glass in front of which they were both standing; not at herself, as Rachel saw with dismay, but at the tearful, excited face of Mary which it reflected in the background. After the pause of a moment, she withdrew her gaze from the mirror to direct it full on Mary herself with the same perplexed thoughtful expression as she always wore when some sensitive chord in her memory was struck. The situation was critical, but poor Mary behaved well; she got up, courtesied, and sidled out by the door that was behind her, saying, "It was time for her to be going and right glad she was to see Miss Rachel so nicely," in a simple, natural way such as could hardly have been looked for in a moment so trying to her faithful affection. Rachel expected Alice would pass some remark on her when she was gone, and so she did.

"What a good, kind face that woman has, Rachel—I felt a longing to kiss her," she began. "I caught her in the glass looking at me as if she loved me too. This has been such a strange day—I know something is in the air, something is going to happen to me. But that I have promised Sinclair not to fret or be unhappy until he can discover and tell me all about papa and where I lived when I was little, I should have asked her if she knew me; for my heart whispers me that I know her. I should like Sinclair to see her; I wish she had not gone away so abruptly—will she be coming to see you again soon, Rachel?" And so she talked on, questioning, asserting, speculating, until to her companion's great relief, the dinner-bell rang and stopped her.

In the garden afterward Sinclair joined Rachel for five minutes to inquire who it was Alice had seen in her room. She told him, and also how, Mary Wray having recognized her foster-child, she had judged it expedient to let her into the truth of the fast escaping mystery.

"Alice knew her too," replied he. "She has been telling me that she is sure it was *Mamsie*, which was probably her pet name for nurse. I have consented to her going to see the Hurtlemere House to-morrow; she is so restless and inquisitive about it that there is no chance of peace for her until she has been. Your brother says Sir Laurence may arrive at almost any hour—do you not think that good woman had better be there and Alice with her when he arrives?"

Rache agreed that this proposal was excellent. Mary Wray used to stand in Gipsy's affections second only to her father, and if she had not vanished when she did and as she did,

the whole secret must have inevitably come out. Alice's memory had been awakened and set on the alert more than ever by this glimpse of a person whom she felt she had once known and dearly loved, and it would never slumber again until its yearnings were satisfied. She looked dreamily happy that evening, but her thoughts were often astray; and some instinct warned her that what she had so long and persistently waited and hoped for was drawing near its fulfillment.

Sinclair suggested that on the morrow the doctor should tell his aunts the true story of their darling while she was away at the Hurtlemere House; and thus the crisis would be over for all at the same hour. And to this the doctor himself readily acceded, though he anticipated in it a difficult and painful task; for the dear old ladies were as far from a suspicion of the facts now as they were on the first night when the poor forlorn little waif was adopted under their hospitable roof.

CHAPTER THE THIRD.

REUNION.

THERE is no instinct like the heart.—BYRON.

THE next morning, as was fitting on such a day of joy, the sun rose splendidly, and Rachel Withers did what she had not attempted now for many many years—that is, took a long walk before breakfast; first to the Force Farm, setting off by six o'clock, and then to the Rectory. At the farm she found Mary Wray busy butter-making, and with a penitent, deprecating air she began to say, ere Rachel had time to speak; that she had been obliged to tell her good man what she had discovered about "lile Miss Annis."

"When he started o' complaining last night, 'Mary, my lass, thee's gotten summat upo' thy mind,' what was a poor wife to do? Why, I just made a clean breast of it, as was most comfortable. That's the blessin' o' a husband, Miss Rachel; if you've gotten a secret you're bound i' love an' duty to tell, an' not let it go on worritting your inside out. But he's away reaping i' th' barley this morning wi' yon crew o' Irishers, so he'll ha' no chance o' saying ought to any body, an' you've no call to be afeard lest he suld be tempted."

It mattered little then if he were—all the world must know the secret soon; and Rachel only replied by explaining to Mary why she was there so early; namely, that it was desired she should be up at the Hurtlemere House when her foster-child arrived there, that if any thing happened before Sir Laurence appeared, she might be ready to take her in hand and pacify her with talk of old times as no one else could. Mary was overjoyed at the reliance placed in her, and having further received permission to take Mistress Dobie into her confidence, she promised just to see breakfast done with, Dicky and Andrew packed off to the rectory out of the way of mischief, and the house *righted-up*, and then to start across the fields by the shortest road, to be in readiness for whatever might occur.

At the Rectory no one was down-stairs but John, whom Rachel found reading his newly come-in letters; one being from Sir Laurence himself and another from Mr. Bond, who had traveled to town to meet him. "Sir Laurence will be here this afternoon, as I expected," announced her brother the moment she entered the room. "I hope you are prepared at Prior's Bank. He wishes me to arrange for *her* being at the Hurlmere House when he arrives."

Rachel replied by telling him what Sinclair had proposed, and how she had just given Mary Wray her cue; which appeared to him very wise as a precautionary measure; but to prevent any possible disappointment to Sir Laurence, he said he would carry his letter to Prior's Bank by and by, and then he gave it to Rachel to read, while he opened Mr. Bond's.

Sir Laurence was very brief—he had never been a long-winded correspondent nor a frequent one. He began by mentioning how he had found John's letter and inclosure at the Hague on the day he arrived there, with a second epistle from Katherine, giving him information that Annis was coming into Hurledale with the kind and charitable women who had adopted her and brought her up. He wrote merely to send warning of his immediate return home, as he should follow his letter within a few hours. Bond, who had met him, had prevailed on him to rest a night in London, and he felt it wise to do so. He was well, but the news had shaken and excited him terribly. Of his brother Oliver not a word; of Lady Georgiana not a word; no expression of resentment, disgust, or even surprise;—simply, "Let the child be at home when I come." That one thought of beholding again his darling had thrust every other out of his mind.

Mr. Bond wrote more at large. He was with Sir Laurence at his hotel, and should return with him to Hurledale on the morrow. He intimated that it would be advisable for the Oliver Warleights to remove from the old house if they had not already done so, but went on to say that Sir Laurence gave no vent to even a natural indignation against them. "In fact," added the steward toward the close of his letter, "my dear master's whole heart is possessed with the joy of regaining his daughter; she will take the loneliness out of his life, of having no one and nothing to come home to after his wanderings. He has traveled day and night from the Hague, and is in high health and spirits, but more excited and impatient than I have known him since he was a lad. I am thankful to see him give in to sleeping here to-night, for rest is very useful to him; he would have made one long spell of his journey had I not been here to hinder it, and would have arrived knocked up."

Thus it fortunately happened that all the arrangements were in accordance with Sir Laurence's wishes and Mr. Bond's suggestions; Alice would be at home, and the Oliver Warleights out of the way, secluded in safety at the rectory. Rachel did not see any of them that morning. Lady Georgiana kept herself entirely to her own rooms; and poor Mortimer had taken a staff in his hand, a knapsack on his back, and ten pounds which John had given him in his pocket, and gone off on a walking expedition

into Cumberland. When he would return was not known. Was it part of his character to get away from the sight of guilt and shame? Neither Katherine nor Grace could approve of his abandonment of father and mother in their present miserable circumstances. He had not uttered a word of his sentiments to any one, nor had he in departing said "Good-by." Lady Georgiana felt his going thus most poignantly, but she acknowledged that it was no more than her deserts—if he *loathed* her it would be but *just*.

Rachel breakfasted at the rectory, rested a couple of hours with Katherine and Grace, and then walked up to the Hurlmere House, proposing to sit quietly in the garden and read until Sinclair Ferrand and Alice appeared. Mary Wray had arrived a few minutes before her, and was standing with Mistress Dobie in the porch engaged in high sensational talk. So enthralled were they that they did not observe Rachel until she was close upon them, and then did Mistress Dobie indeed greet her with loudly jubilant exclamations.

"She'd as good as guessed it lang syne, but wasn't it gret news about Sir Laurence Warleigh's bairn?" said she. "She'd gotten a bit scairt o' writing fra Mr. Bond only that morning to tell her t' master was coming home, an' she must mak preparation for a second person beside; an' who did Miss Rachel think this second person was? Why, no other than lile Miss Annis who was dead and is alive again, an' was lost an' is found! An' she hoped it was no sin to quote Scripser to say that, for common words wouldn't do it."

Fain would she have staid to talk longer, but she suddenly remembered there was "a sight o' things wanted doing indoors," and so she disappeared, taking Mary Wray with her to help work, and perhaps help gossip as well, while Rachel Withers remained in the porch resting on one of the quaint old stone benches which had never been removed from it since Moor Murray's ancestors of many generations back placed them there, as Matthew Dobie, who practically understood the indulgence, averred, for the free and pleasanter enjoyment of their evening pipes. He smoked his own in the porch of summer nights when his master was away, and had smoked himself into a full conviction that the stone benches had been put there wholly and solely to promote the ease and comfort of all sound lovers of tobacco.

Rachel had seen the Hurlmere House in all weathers, and the view from it under all aspects of time and season, but she never remembered to have thought the landscape lovelier than it was on this day. The calm rich glow and fullness of August, when summer was greenest in the woods, and the moors had donned their mantle of splendid purple, took away the air of chill desolation from about the lonely old house. In the sun the tarn lay bright and still, glittering like a gem, while the terrace and sloping lawns of the old-fashioned garden were gay with roses, pinks, stocks and other hardy flowers such as ask but little tendance and cultivation. Rachel had brought up with her a book, extracted from her godmamma Grandage's choice shelf, but she could not read it successfully; if she sent her eye traveling along the lines, in due time

the foot of the page was reached, but not the sense of a single word had penetrated to her mind; therefore she gave herself up perforce to the luxury of laziness and meditation, beguiling the time as best she might by inspecting the borders and making discoveries of plants forgotten, or perhaps never noticed before, but continually wending round by the gate to watch if Sunshine and Sinclair were yet a-coming.

She had long to wait—very long it seemed to her impatience. One o'clock struck, then two; and leg-tired at last, she retreated to the porch again, and once more appealed to the old book to amuse her, but with no better results than before: then she fell to thinking of Helena, and recalled several sunny hours with her in this very place whence her child had been banished for so many years. Then she drew round to this present time, and her imagination anticipated in a hundred foolish, dramatic, impossible fashions the manner of the meeting that was now so near at hand. Still there was no sign of Alice or her lover. She could not help beginning to wonder then, and to speculate over their delay, hoping it portended no intervention of evil mischance. Thrice did Mary Wray come out to ask if she thought it possible they had changed their minds, but Rachel was positive they would not do *that*. Nevertheless her anxiety increased to a painful pitch, and she could have screamed for joy when at about a quarter before three they actually presented themselves, Sunshine beaming bright as the day, but Sinclair unusually grave. The sight of Rachel appeared to relieve him; he said he had begun to fear she might have given them up and have gone away; but there had been small risk of that.

"It is a steep climb up-hill, and there are so many beauties to admire by the road that we could not make up for the time lost before, so Rachel must forgive us," said Alice, drawing a long breath; then she stood still gazing round on the prospect with clear, happy, earnest eyes. "It seems half familiar to me," she added after a pause of leisurely contemplation; and next, in answer to a question of Rachel's, she began to explain the cause of their tardy arrival. As usual, it was the merest trifles in the world that had procured for her such a tedious interval of waiting and anxiety.

"It was not quite our fault," said Alice, "Aunt Delia wanted me to hem a missionary-basket petticoat after breakfast, and even Sinclair bade me be obedient to-day, and that kept us until twelve o'clock. Then I incautiously told her that if we found you here, we should spend the afternoon in the woods round about, and not go back until dinner-time. That produced another hindrance—we must not start until after luncheon; so luncheon was ordered half-an-hour earlier, and here we are at last. But how could you say the Hurtlemer House was wild and desolate, Rachel? I think it is the most romantic and picturesque spot in the dale."

"Not the prettiest or the pleasantest to live in, though," replied Rachel. "It is showing you its best face now, and I am glad you like it."

"Like it," said she, and was going to expatiate on its peculiar attractions, when she caught sight of Mary Wray who was looking out of

one of the upper windows. Mary drew back when she saw herself observed, but Alice's mood, tone, and manner changed completely. "Rachel, who is that person who was with you yesterday?" she asked in a low voice but with passionate earnestness. "She is here now; I want to speak to her. Let me speak to her. May we go into the house?" She was steadily drawing Rachel toward it all the while, recognition dawning clearer and clearer in her wide-eyed gaze, until near the porch she stopped, and crushing Rachel's wrist painfully hard in her excitement, cried, "Oh, look at that porch, at those steps and the golden moss! Look at those stone seats, Sinclair! I know them all. I have either dreamt this place or I have been here before! Dear Sinclair, let me go in, let me go in!"

"If you will try to be still," said he, and taking both her hands, turned her toward him, looking at her with a pleading, controlling kindness.

"I will not fret if I can't help it—I will be good, I will, indeed!" and she smiled over her childlike promise with lips that quivered and eyes glittering through tears. Rachel was no firmer; emotion is catching, but she kept behind the two as they entered the porch where now stood Mistress Dobie, her shrewd old visage twisted up into a knot with suppressed curiosity and feeling.

Alice was too much agitated to notice any thing but that she was not "mamsie;" and when the dame said, "You'll mayhap like to walk in wi' your friends, Miss Rachel, an' tak' a rest," it was clear she meant to wait for a recognition. Rachel asked her to show them into the large old dining-hall, which she remembered as the room chiefly occupied by Sir Laurence and Gipsy in former days; and when she threw the door wide open, whispered her to send in Mary Wray at once.

Alice stood still as a statue just in the doorway for perhaps the space of half a minute, then uttered a cry of ecstasy that rang again in the hollow, rafted roof. "It is, it is, it is!" she reiterated, her voice mounting higher and higher, and all her tears vanishing in the supreme moment of joy. "Here is Sir Sumfit and the Ogre, and here are Ye Babes! Oh, Sinclair, dear Sinclair, this is where I lived with papa!" She darted to the fireplace, now filled with summer-green boughs, and began fingering over with tender touch the grotesquely carved heads that ornamented the high oaken mantle-piece, her face kindled with passionate gladness, her breath coming in short, quick, panting gasps.

At that instant entered Mary Wray, who had overheard her voice, trembling and saying, "Oh, my sweet bairn, my blessed bairn, that's what you ca'd 'em when you only lisped, an' fed 'em wi' biscuit every night that Magsie could hardlings pyke it out o' their jaws i' the morning. Oh, my lile Annis, that I ha' whipped, an' cuddled, an' kissed, an' kissed again, surely you'll know me? You'll know *mamsie*—pretty Mamsie, you did use to say, but I an't pretty now but to my good man at home!"

If Annis knew her! It was touching to witness the rapture of recognition, to see the tears, to hear the broken words in which there was so much meaning, and so little verbal sense! Mary felt all a mother's passionate yearning of love

over the child, and fondled and caressed her as if she had been a tiny thing again; stroking her glossy hair, her rosy cheeks, and lifting up her dimpled chin to tell her with tender flattery she was bonnier than the bonniest flower that ever grew; but "like Gipsy every bit of her, an' she should have known her amongst ten thousand!"

Alice was quite carried out of herself for some minutes; but at length she looked slowly round from face to face, and seeing nothing but a glad sympathy in any, asked,

"Where is papa, Sinclair? This was our home, but where is *he*?"

"On his road, Sunshine — you will see him before the day is over, if all be well," replied Sinclair.

"All is well! all shall be well!" cried she, passionately. "Oh, mamsie, press your hand over my heart!" She twisted herself half round as if in physical pain; the exquisite joy touched very close on the borders of anguish.

"Come to the window," interposed Sinclair in his firm, kind, soothing voice; and taking her away from Mary, he made her stand by him quiet and silent, looking out on the hushed afternoon until the oppressive flood of feeling went down. Then, when she was able to bear it, he told her how he had come to know her secret two days before.

"And you did not tell me—ah! it was unkind," said she reproachfully.

"Was it unkind? then you must forgive me, for I meant it to be kind—I kept it that you might not have long to wait; because excitement wears you out, and I can not bear to see you fret."

Gipsy did not look very implacable; she accepted Sinclair's plea—even tried to interrupt it.

"I am sure you love me," said she, and was therewith content. He then told her how aunt Delia and aunt Flora had been kept in the dark like herself, and how she must endeavor to cheer and comfort them; for if she were making a great gain, they would feel it almost like suffering a loss.

"Dear old auntie Dee!" murmured she, with sudden compunction for many a past and gone bit of rebellion; "I am glad I hemmed that ugly striped Abbeokouta petticoat this morning! I will work nothing but missionary-basket for a month; I will read dull books, and be as good as gold all day that you shall hardly know me!" Then she grew excited again. "I have such an ache at my heart—say it once more, Sinclair, say it once more — *I shall see papa to-day*." Sinclair repeated the assurance with every variety of speech, but even then hardly could he satisfy her ears with hearing it. "Let him not be long or I shall die!" exclaimed she with strongly repressed emotion, looking up in her lover's face as if he could help her.

Sinclair tried the effect of tender, soothing words upon her, but the sob swelled in her throat and the tears in her eyes, until Mary Wray with practical ~~new~~ ^{new}ness, having mastered her own feelings, introduced herself into the conversation.

"Whisht, my bairn, whisht!" cried she, cheerfully. "Who talks o' dying when a' is just coming bright side up for 'em i' th' world? Main foolish wad it be to die now; just when

your father's coming back after he's lived all these years wi' out you. Ha' done wi' fretting an' such nonsense; an' let us talk o' better things nor dying which is t' last an' worst we can do."

And so they did talk, Mary sustaining the chief burden of it for the next half hour. But Alice could not be still in one place, and it needed a visible effort to keep down her agitation as she went about the room, holding Sinclair's arm and trying to recognize other old acquaintance in the stags' heads and curious spoils of the chase which still decorated the walls as in former times. But it was only the sculptured faces of the chimney-piece that she was able to remember distinctly; the general aspect of the room seemed familiar to her but not its details. It had just now the same air of dismal, forlorn emptiness as it wore on that memorable winter afternoon when Oliver Warleigh came to Hnrtledale on his first mission.

Alice paused by and by on the hearth, and said musingly, as she gazed down on the bare boards: "I wonder what became of all the dogs?"

Mary Wray suggested that perhaps Mistress Dobie could tell; and Mistress Dobie to her fervent delight was summoned, dropt curtesies, and very respectfully acknowledged her master's daughter on Mary's introduction.

"But I don't think as I suld ha' known her in a crowd," said she when appealed to on that point. "When you tell me it's Miss Annis, I see them's her eyes, an' she has a look o' her poor young mother, for all she's not so fair. But it's the *voice* as is most like *her* — oh! but Sir Laurence 'll knaw it well. He used to say long after she were gone, as he heard her calling to him in that pretty, petted, impatient way she had, 'Laurie, Laurie!' I could ha' believed at odd times I've heard her myself, round about i' the garden o' the long summer nights!"

Alice listened with tearful eyes, and drew a deep quivering breath as Mistress Dobie ceased, but Sinclair was determined if possible to keep her calm, and quietly set aside tenderer reminiscences by asking the farmer's wife if she could tell what had become of Gipsy's old canine friends. Mistress Dobie, who plumed herself justly on the possession of an excellent memory, needed no second invitation to open out her chronicle of defunct dogs, dating from Annis's babyhood. Considering the ordinary term of dog-life, it was not probable that any should survive which had been the little wildling's playmates, and she was therefore not surprised when the good dame began by saying with a suitable pathetic sigh, "Eh, Miss Annis, I'm thinking they're all dead. There were Cosmo dropt only three year sin' come Martinmas; he was very auld—a black dog, if you mind him, wi' a white breast—a good-natured beast never lived; an' you tewed him about awful, you did—put him on a nightcap, an' Matt's spectacles, an' a short pipe in his mouth as he was a pacter to see; our Maggie'll talk about it to this day she will, laughing and crying together. An' Jet—he were all black an' a bit cross-grained when things didn't suit him, which was pretty oft; an' a terrier as Matt ca'ed Mitty-maxy, but he were properly christened Yapp, for all his noise he made when he

were a pup, as he might ha' had three head o' his ain to make it wi'. An' t' auld lass Juno—there's a grandson o' hers i' t' yard now, an' another down at the Mill—Luey Robb has him; but t' Danish dog's new, an' we an't had t' Roossian retriever long, nor t' Samplong beast as is as big as a donkey, an' o' no use at a' i' this cauntry unless it be to eat us out o' house an' home, an' keep Magsie doing for iver wi' biscuit, and tallow-crap, an' a copperful o' butcher's meat every day." Mistress Dobie's present canine grievances threatened to be long drawn out, and they were still in progress when a sound of wheels was heard to which every ear listened. The dame bustled off, but returned in a minute explaining that it was only Matt coming up the hill with the cart.

Alice bore this marvelously well; just a little sigh escaped her, and then she asked, breaking a pause of painful stillness, if there were not in the house a small, curiously decorated room with many pictures and ornaments on the walls.

"That'll be the bit chapel-place—has my bairn kept memory o' that?" said Mary Wray; and Mistress Dobie added solemnly, "Yes, it's here an' just as it was. Master allus spent in it th' day he married his wife an' the day she died, poor thing. He carries t' key awa wi' him, an' when he comes home, he takes me in an' sits by while I rightle it up. There's her prayer-books an' things he must do himself, they're that holy to him. An' you recollect it, Miss Annis? It was the spot i' all the house your mother loved best; she wer a good young creature as ever lived she wer, though she might be a papist. It wer i' that faith she'd been brought up: an' I ha' but sma' opinion o' them that change fra' what they were taught when they were bairns. There's a sight mair conceat i' such fettle folks religion than there was i' t' good auld fashioned sort o' catechism piety which speaks plain, an' bids us love God an' our neebors; an' she did that, she did; she was gentle to t' meanest thing alive—she wadn't harm a worm; an' what was harder to my mind, she forgave them as 'ud never look at her; as treated her worse than the ground under their feet, as darkened her death-bed wi' fear an' sorrow for her bairn, ay' an' robbed her bairn away when she were dead!"

It was of no use now. Mistress Dobie had worked herself up into a state of angry vindictiveness as she recalled her young mistress's wrongs and sufferings, and Alice was infected by the feeling. She began to weep, softly at first, but as her passion gathered strength by its indulgence it quite overpowered her, and swept away all her hardly maintained self-control. She could know nothing of the real truth, but an impression of deep sorrow inflicted on her mother, innocent as herself, stung her heart, and over that came the dark array of her own childish agonies; until the sense of accumulated pity and pain utterly overwhelmed and crushed her. There she was, kneeling on the floor, her face hidden in Mary's bosom, and Mary's kind arms encircling her, while Sinclair Ferrand stood by helpless and grieved, when unmistakably a carriage drove in at the gate, round to the porch and stopped. But she was past hearing it now, as she was past hearing her Mamsie's soothing and tender "Whisht, my bairn, whisht!"

It might be about three minutes after when

Sir Laurence Warleigh entered the room with Mr. Bond behind him and Mistress Dobie who had hurried off on their arrival, leading the way. "She's here, Sir Laurence, she's here, like Miss Annis, but she ain't like any longer as you'll say when you see her!" cried the dame, performing the introduction in her own fashion, which, as it happened, was as good a fashion as any—not erring on the sentimental side at least, and making few words do.

"She is just what I expected—little lasses have a trick of growing up," observed Mr. Bond, chuckling at his own wit.

Sir Laurence spoke not a word, but as Annis rose from her knees, looking up at him wistfully and searchingly, he took her face between his hands and kissed her; then put her off a little way, smiling down into her eyes until the bright light came back to them, and she half sighed, half sobbed: "I know you, papa!"

"And I know my Gipsy too," replied he; "we must give Rachel Withers a pair of spectacles for not having been quick-sighted enough to find her our for me before."

Rachel was taken aback, she thought the remark cruel, but every body else laughed.

"A vara gradely lass," growled a husky voice at the open door, echoed by a shrill cry of, "Oh, but she's bonnie!" and behold there was Matthew Dobie and Maggie with him, both gaping and jubilant, staring in upon the scene. These sounds awoke Mistress Dobie to a sense of the proprieties, and she immediately whisked herself off, carrying Mary Wray and the others with her.

And in this manner came about the reunion that had been the long hope of Sunshine's heart while all the world was against her. Just "I know you, papa;" and "I know my Gipsy too!" Nothing could have been quicker, easier, simpler, more natural; and it was over in a tithe of the time that it has taken to record it.

Alice countenance cleared, and she kept a loving gaze on her father as he did on her. He was the less changed of the two; twelve years of exile and wandering had not altered his appearance; his hair and beard were grizzled, but he was still in the full vigor of life.

"If I had met you by chance, papa, I should have claimed you," said Alice presently. "We have been once before under the same roof together—that was at Remagen this summer, yet we missed. If you had seen me there, should you have thought I was Gipsy, or should you have gone by without remembering me!"

"I did see you—I saw you with your kind friends coming up from the boat, and again on the balcony in the twilight, but I believed my little wildling to lie buried in Hurtledeale churchyard with her mother. She haunted my fancy strangely that night, and in the morning I got away to escape from melancholy. My own darling, we have a world of acquaintance to make over the years we have lost since we said goodbye on the sea-shore at Hastings."

"You are not strange to me, papa," murmured Alice with a soft accent of complaint. "So many things come back into my mind—you do not remember as well as I do."

"I remember my Gipsy so high," leveling his hand considerably below Sunshine's present height; "first as a shaggy, brown elf, whom no

one could break-in to docile behavior except by petting and infinite patience and love; then trimmed and pruned and pruned into the likeness of a wee quakeress, the picture of precision and demure obedience. That was my last glimpse of my wildling until now that she returns herself on my hands, a tall, well-grown maiden, old as her mother was when I first saw her—my Gipsy evidently, but with a difference."

Mr. Bond had fully prepared his master for the position of affairs at Prior's Bank, and retaining his daughter with one arm Sir Laurence now held out his right hand to Sinclair Ferrand, and they exchanged a cordial, heartfelt grasp; friends at first sight. Then Sunshine blushed and smiled saying, "This is Sinclair, papa—I wish auntie Dee and aunt Flora were here. Shall you be too tired to come down to Prior's Bank and see them this evening?"

"I shall not be too tired to do whatever will most gratify my dear little daughter," replied Sir Laurence in a cheerful tone. "I am anxious to see all to whom she and I owe so much."

And then every thing went pleasantly, serenely, and happily; there was not incessant talk, but the intervals of silence were as expressive; heart speaking to heart the love and joy and gratitude that the lips were too weak to utter.

A pang of self-reproach had flashed across Rachel Withers just at this climax. What right had she to be where she was while Miss Delia, who had been as a mother to the child, was absent? She felt almost vexed at herself for the prominence she had needlessly assumed; and bethought her that the wisest step she could now take would be to go away. By and by Mr. Bond went quietly out, then she followed, and having escaped unobserved made her way swiftly down to Prior's Bank.

As she passed the drawing-room window she saw Miss Delia seated at work in her usual place, with her sister opposite, and the doctor, for a miracle, bearing them company. If he had not prepared them, she thought; and for a little while she staid outside and gathered a rose or two off the wall, deferring the troublesome moment as long as possible; but when she nerved herself up and entered at last, she found them arranged all in state in their best caps and silver-silk dresses, prattling very fast and excitedly, but looking as blithe and pretty and happy as it was possible for two old ladies to do.

"Well, Rachel, here you are back again, and a nice maneuverer *you* are!" exclaimed Miss Delia as she presented herself. "Did you imagine we could not bear good news? and to keep dear Sunshine in the dark as well!—it was *too* bad."

"I am to be blamed first and Sinclair second, sister Delia," interposed the doctor. "We advised your being excluded from the secret for the peace' sake of the household. Perhaps it was rather shabby behavior, but any thing for a quiet life!"

"Any thing for a quiet life, indeed! a pretty excuse—but it was shameful!" returned the old lady, half in jest, half in earnest. "Has he come, Rachel? Don't stand there mute, but tell us, has Sir Laurence Warleigh come, and has he seen his daughter? I shall always *feel* and *say* that it was *my* place to have been at the Hurltemere House to give her up to him, and

not *yours* or Sinclair's. I am not superannuated *yet*, and who should be so glad as myself that the dear child was right in believing her father to be alive? Nobody loves her better, or would *do* more or *sacrifice* more for her, I'm sure."

"We agreed beforehand, sister, not to allude to this part of the subject," said Miss Flora soothingly. "It is a very happy event, and we will all rejoice in it. Rachel has been a good deal worried lately, and we will not distress her now."

"Far be it from me to distress her, but she is sometimes too clever by half; yes, Rachel, that is your fault, you always like to manage every body and every thing in a way of your own," said Miss Delia, launching at her a glance of tart rebuke.

This was not the first time by many that Rachel had heard people unconsciously attribute their own peculiar virtues to others by way of accusation, therefore she bore her rebuke meekly. But while she was undergoing her lecture, of course the flow of news ceased, and Miss Flora being affectionately impatient to hear all there was to tell, begged her sister to put off her scolding for the present, and to let Rachel speak. And then Rachel entered on a full and particular account of every thing that had happened from the moment of Sunshine's arrival with Sinclair at the Hurltemere House, interrupted only by tender ejaculations of "Poor darling!" and "Bless her dear heart!" until she came to mention that Sir Laurence would walk down that evening to see them, arriving probably with Alice and Sinclair to dinner, when Miss Delia, in an accent of vehement impatience, exclaimed, "Really, Rachel, I think you have lost your head! Why did you not mention that at first? Flora, dear, I must speak to James," and with sudden hospitable cares on her mind the old lady vanished.

"I advise you to brace up your mind to bear blame from all quarters, Rachel," whispered the doctor mischievously, when she was gone out of hearing. "I have done wonders for you in the way of pacification, but Delia has not been fairly treated—she has been robbed of conversation." He took a pinch of snuff and offered Rachel another to comfort her, but she declined it with thanks. Then Miss Flora asked if it was dear Sunshine's own suggestion that Sir Laurence should visit them immediately, and being told that it was, she called her a "good little heart!" and went off to communicate to her sister this gratifying fact. As soon as Rachel and the doctor were alone, the doctor gave his companion some details of how he had accomplished his task, and congratulated her on being absent from the house when he undertook it; adding, however, that though his sisters felt rather hurt in their dignity at being kept in ignorance to the last as to what was impending, they did nothing but rejoice in the event itself.

Indeed, Rachel had perceived by their having donned their most becoming attire that they were treating the day as one of vast pleasantness and importance, altogether worthy to be marked with white; and thereby paying a delicate compliment to Alice, who liked to see them look *nice*, and often fondly objected to aunt Delia's caps garnished with flat ascetic-hued ribbons. She was sure to be pleased when she saw them, for when not purposely disfigured by some un-

manageably ugly article of raiment they were as pretty a pair of old ladies as any in England. She liked to tease them by telling them so; for petulant, perverse, willful as she had oftentimes been by their accusation and her own penitent confession, she loved them as dearly and as fondly as they deserved she should.

Rachel Withers was in her room when Sir Laurence arrived and his meeting with the aunts took place; but a few minutes after Sunshine burst in upon her, exclaiming, "Oh, Rachel, I am too, too happy!" She was like an April shower, half mirth, half tears, when she flung her arms round her sober friend as a slight vent to her feelings. "There is papa down-stairs, and I wish you had seen him hug auntie Dee! She is in ecstasies, and so is aunt Flora; look, there they are in the garden with him now—Rachel, I know papa as well as if I had only been taken away from him yesterday, we are not at all shy of each other. I could go on talking to him forever. But oh, you dear old wicked blind mole, why did you not discover me long ago, and comfort me up when I fell into my cruel moods?"

"I shall collect evidence as to who knew you and who did not—only Mary Wray and your father have done so as yet," retorted Rachel, with feigned vexation; whereupon Alice gave her a vehement embrace, protested she loved her, and acknowledged that it was she who had given her her first crumb of encouragement and comfort; and then as Rachel was dressed for dinner already, her impetuous young companion carried her off to her own sanctum to help her.

"I want to look pretty for papa as well as for Sinclair to-night," said she with a shy laugh at her own innocent vanity. "I should not like him to think me not so nice as his fancy—he hoped I should be like mamma."

The dinner and the evening passed over very happily; there was no stiffness or uncomfatableness by reason of people not understanding each other. Sir Laurence's reception of Sinclair had vouched already for his acquiescence in his daughter's engagement, and removed any irksome doubts that the young man might have very naturally entertained. He looked gay, and Sunshine at his right hand beamed lovely, while Sir Laurence with his fine bronzed traveler's face seemed quite at ease and at home in his unwonted company. He watched Alice incessantly and with visible delight, and when they were all out on the lawn after dinner, and she was prattling in fond, affectionate, cooing tones to aunt Delia, whom she had taken to petting especially, he laid a caressing hand on her bright head, and said, in a tone of infinite, touching tenderness, "Oh, my little Gipsy, thou hast thy mother's sweet tongue!" Mistress Dobie had recognized the familiar tone in her voice too.

Great excitements are but coldly set forth in words and phrases; but it would be impossible to imagine a happier group of people than those gathered together at Prior's Bank that night. The aunts, as usual, bore a very disproportionate share of the conversation, but no one begrudged it them; the doctor's voice was rarely heard, he took snuff often, and quoted his favorite authors silently. Sinclair and Rachel looked on; Gipsy tried to sing but could not—she broke down in her first ballad, and rushing to Sir Laurence

flung herself on her knees beside him, crying, "It is only because I am so glad, papa!" And for the rest of the evening she was suffered to stay by him in silent enjoyment of her unutterable happiness.

About eleven o'clock he went away, leaving Alice with her aunts until the morrow, and the doctor and Sinclair bore him company in the moonlight half the way back to the Hurltemere House. All the womankind then adjourned to Miss Delia's room, and prattled themselves weary. And so this great day came to an end.

II.

"You need none of you look for Sunshine to-day," was Miss Delia's circular address as she entered the breakfast-room alone on the following morning. The doctor immediately inquired, Why so? and Sinclair echoed the question.

"Because she has gone off to the Hurltemere House to make *quite sure* her father is there," was the answer. "She woke me up this morning before six o'clock with a pathetic plea that she had not slept a wink, and yesterday felt so like a dream, *might* she go and see papa again? I could not refuse her permission, and it would have been of no use if I had, for she was ready dressed for a start. I only hope she put on her over-shoes or strong boots, because there was a heavy dew and the grass is still wet. She could come to no harm, and her restless feeling is very natural; but, perhaps, you had better go and look after her, Sinclair, when breakfast is over." This Sinclair said he should certainly do, and he expressed a little lover-like disapproval of her having set off across the fields unattended; he would have been ready to go with her at a word of warning.

The elders had a very quiet day down at Prior's Bank without the young folks; for when Sinclair once left them he did not return. John Withers came in for half an hour to talk events over; he had been up to the Hurltemere House already to congratulate Sir Laurence on the restoration of his daughter. Sinclair Ferrand arrived while he was there, and he had left the trio in the porch, all very happy together with two dogs at their feet; Sir Laurence smoking, and Gipsy asking him to tell her about his wanderings, and quite familiar friends already. The aunts missed their capricious Sunshine very much; and all the more, perhaps, because they felt this present absence was only a foretaste of what must by and by be the every-day atmosphere at Brookfall; nevertheless Miss Delia, busily stitching at a missionary frock, said in her most amiable way, "We must not be selfish, sister Flo!—it would have been much the same had our dear girl married Mr. More; what a mercy it is that Providence sometimes sees fit to defeat our best intentions! Mr. More would not have suited Sir Laurence as a son-in-law at all!" Miss Flora cordially acquiesced—she thought it had been quite a *deliverance*.

"You may smile, Rachel, you were right for once," Miss Delia continued, with an air of cheerful candor; "and it has turned out for the best. But supposing it had *not* done so—life is uncertain, and had any thing happened to us, there would she have been left at the mercy of that man who called himself her uncle. As for her having other opportunities of marrying, I am not

so sure—men grow scarcer and scarcer every day; I wonder sometimes where they are all gone to. Look what thousands of nice girls are unmarried—Mrs. Wallis declares it is quite melancholy at Knowle, she could tell of fifty on her fingers whom she has watched blushing out at eighteen, and fading down to thirty with never a chance of settling. Look at me—I was neither ugly nor penniless, and I never had an offer in my life; there's Flora, too, she never had but one, and he was only a cousin, and poor papa would not hear of him. And *you* yourself, Rachel, I never heard that any body proposed to you but Mr. Gilsland. I know *one* lady, to be sure, who had *fourteen* offers, and the fourteenth was but a crooked stick, though she married him; to be rid of the rest, I suppose, or else because she was afraid he might be the last; but she was uncommonly lovely, and the men ran after her like a flock of sheep. I think it is the prettiest and nicest women who get married, or else it improves a woman to marry her. Sunshine with her beauty *might* have found other lovers had not Sinclair wanted her, but I am sure at Claymire there is nobody possible but Mr. Clarke, and she would never have made a profitable wife to a curate. We none of us have faith enough—we want to lay out the world too far beforehand; if I could have imagined matters would turn out as they have done, what hours of fret and worry I might have spared myself.”

During the afternoon Rachel Withers fell in with Farmer Robb, who said his wife had charged him with a message that she hoped *she* was not forgotten; she had heard the great news about Sir Laurence and his daughter, but she was laid fast at present and could not go up to see Miss Annis; would Miss Annis therefore go down to see her? Rachel promised that she should, and then inquired if Lucy were ill. “No, she were not exactlings *ill*,” the miller cautiously replied; “but she were occupied wi’ another babby as she mostlings was now abouts. It were the seventh, an’ a vera fine lad th’ women told him, but he thought it nobbut small.” Rachel ended her walk by paying Lucy a visit, and when her wee whimperer would allow any voice but his own to be heard, she told her about Annis.

“I’m noways surprised she should be living,” was Lucy’s comment on the story. “It was always suspicious to my mind that Lady Georgiana should be in such a hurry to get Salter out of the way when I was gone; for she was a good nurse, and attached to the children, all of ’em, and not to one more than another: but she was not the body to wink at what was wrong or to lend herself to any bad, underhand doings. Lupton was another sort—I could not abide that woman! She went away as bowld as Hector when it was all found out; Mistress Dobie would have a good riddance of her! She’ll come to a bad end, it’s in her face. She’s over high learnt in doctor’s wares an’ drugs to be a safe nurse, and it’s my belief she’d not be particular about mixing something not wholesome in either physic or food for them that stood in her way. All the same, she gave Mathew Dobie a recipe that worked like a charm on his rheumatics; I got it made up last winter for Robb—he has it bad in his back in damp weather.”

The distrust of Mrs. Lupton was growing universal. Rachel Withers had received a let-

ter from Carrie Martin only that morning in which she mentioned the nurse’s return to her own house. When she came to Hurtlemere to attend on Oliver Warleigh she had placed a woman in it, under Dr. Frith’s supervision to attend to her lodgers. Carrie had retained her apartments during the interregnum, and still tenanted them, but she was now contemplating an immediate change of quarters.

“I know too much of the beneficent creature’s secret history to find her coffee any longer safe or pleasant drinking,” said she, writing in her ironical fashion. “I shall nevertheless regret leaving her; the house is quiet, the neighborhood retired, and the service respectful, while the domestic confiscations are very trifling—also she makes the best *omelettes soufflées* I ever tasted out of Paris. I think she would be the better for a good hanging, but that is quite between ourselves at present—the public will probably participate in the sentiment by and by. Your Hurtlemere romance under the transparent mask of initials has already crept into one of the daily papers; the amiable Mrs. Lupton handed it to me and pointed out the story; but I flatter myself she did not detect in my open countenance any tokens that I knew her share in it. I asked her if she believed it possible such things could be—*out of a novel*—and smiling in derision at my simplicity, she cried, ‘Ay, possible enough! I have known darker deeds done than that, deeds that bided in the dark too.’ I encouraged her to carry the masked lantern of her talk down into the crypt of her iniquities, and she told me a little narrative of a suicide which would be a capital foundation for a winter’s tale; only for *suicide* I should write *murder*, and fix the guilt of it on the phantom representing herself. She is an inveterate boaster, and always betrays an inclination to adopt the first rôle in her melodramas, so that she may not be quite so black as she paints herself. These bad clever women blunder into one fatal mistake—they believe all the world to be fools except themselves.”

III.

The next day Sir Laurence Warleigh moved down to Prior’s Bank to *live* there during the stay of his daughter’s kind benefactresses; it was the easiest and pleasantest way of inuring their minds to the idea of a brief separation from her by and by. Grouse-shooting was just beginning, and he and Sinclair Ferrand were much out on the moors together, when the aunts were left in full enjoyment of their Sunshine as before. She had several pleasant duties of affection to do, such as showing them the Hurtlemere House, which they thought a dismal dungeon, and going with them to visit Lucy. Neither Lucy nor Alice recognized each other, but they spent a long hour together; Lucy telling her old nursling of her mother’s life at Everham before her marriage, and of the strange feeling it was to both when they first came into the dales. Alice had a thousand questions to ask of those days, and Lucy as many reminiscences to detail. When Alice went home after this exciting talk she was glad to be still and think it all over in a quiet corner of the garden by herself. The last few days had opened up new depths in her character;

she was calmer, gentler, more considerate and yielding to every body about her. She had got rid of the thorn from her heart which had grievously pricked and pained her while she believed her father to be alive, and others treated the belief as an extravagant delusion.

One day she rode over to Bristowe with Sir Laurence and Sinclair to be presented to Mrs. Damer Warleigh, who was the only member of her father's family who had known or acknowledged her mother; and the next morning's post brought to the gratified aunts a letter from the excellent old lady. She could not come over to Prior's Bank, said she, for she was very old, weak, and half blind; but she begged them all to visit her at Bristowe before their return to the south, that she might thank them in person for the loving labor they had lavished on her dear Laurence's child, whom she found beautiful and with every sign of goodness and virtue in her countenance. She also expressed her satisfaction that the tie of adoption by which she had been so long bound to her benefactress was to be strengthened and made permanent by her marriage with their nephew, Sinclair; who, she added, must be worthy of *her* being akin to *them*. The dignified grandame had lost none of her grace or graciousness, and the aunts were touched and delighted by her letter.

There was some suggestion of Sunshine's being taken to Whinstane to visit Lady Foulis in her tower, but this was forestalled by a rather striking coincidence. Rachel Withers while at the rectory had heard from Kester Graves that Effie Benson had inquired for her several times, and expressed an earnest wish to see her; but the events that were just then happening had been too absorbing to leave her leisure to gratify the poor old woman's desire. She had now, however, time on her hands, and one morning after a brief call at the rectory, she dropped in at Effie's cottage for a gossip and a longer rest such as the lonely old dame always expected from her. It was wonderful how Effie preserved her faculties and her strength of body still; she told Rachel that day she was turned of eighty-five. The little house was as neat and clean as possible, every bit of metal about it shining like looking-glass; and there was Effie seated in her chimney-corner knitting the rector's annual supply of winter socks without even spectacles.

"My mind's been running strangely on Lady Foulis this last day or two," she said, as soon as personal civilities had been exchanged with her visitor.

"Have you seen her since you came into Hurtledeale this time, Miss Rachel?" Rachel replied that she had not, but she hoped to do so before leaving the north again. "Ay, do, an' let me know how she fares, will you?" added Effie. "I can't get her out o' my head. I think t' Lord's forgotten to call on her, for she's a good ten years auldter than me. She must be ninety-seven or ninety-eight at the least. I could tell exactlings if I had th' old Bible, but Jack carried it away—she was born the same day as him, and he's been dead now going on for sixty years; but what became of th' old Bible I don't know—fell into strange hands like-lings; th' Lord' give 'em a blessing with it!" She was silent for a few minutes gazing musingly into the embers until Rachel asked her if she

knew Lady Foulis when she was young. "Yes, I knew her—every body about the country knew her when I was a little 'un," was the answer. "My father held a farm under th' auld colonel's father—th' gret squire as we called him—an' awful doings there was up at the tower in th' gret squire's times. She was very bonny but wickedder than she was bonny, and she over the border at last wi' divil Foulis and married him in Scotland. He was a gentleman born, but he'd ruined himself wi' gambling an' wastry, and was no better nor a horse-jock when she took off wi' him. She'd a bad bringing up, she had; but o' th' Sundays in church, I remember when I was a little lass staring at her and thinking surely the angels in heaven must sing like yon. Th' gret squire died about a year after she left him, and then t' auld colonel, but he was a youngish man then, came into the property. 'Twas t' colonel adopted him as was Sir William after—he was the very moral of divil Foulis when he grew up, but nobody guessed then whose son he was. What got divil Foulis none of us ever heard, but she came back ragged and raving one blazing hot day in the harvest time, and the colonel kept her shut up ever after in the north tower. Dear, how well I remember the talk of it when I was a lass! Folks called her a witch, and every mishap in the dale was laid on her—and oh, the ghost-music she played in the dead o' the night! It gave me the creeps to listen, but oft and oft when mother was in bed have I got up an' opened the window to hear it. They said she grew right of her wits in a year or two, but she never stirred out in the sun any more, and I never saw her face again after the last time I saw her singing i' church. It is like what she was then she keeps running over and over again in my mind."

It was very remarkable that Rachel Withers, just as she was leaving the cottage, should meet Mathew Dobie, who stopped her to say:

"Ha' ye heard, Miss Rachel, as auld Leddy Foulis is dead?"

She turned back at once and told the news to Effie.

"Eh, that's been it," responded she; "I was looking for it. The Lord Almighty's thought on her at last. Christ give her rest to her soul, for she dreed an awful penance if she did murder him as they said."

The last words were spoken very low, but Rachel caught them. Perhaps they revealed the kernel of that dark mystery which hung so long, and hangs yet, round the north tower at Whinstane. The country-folk say Lady Foulis haunts it dead as she haunted it living, and that the shepherds on the hills at night still hear her eerie ghost-music floating out upon the wind as they used to hear it before her body was laid with her kinsfolk in the vault of Penslaven Church.

In passing by Helena's grave on her way to the rectory that morning, Rachel had observed that the inscription on the memorial stone commemorative of her child had been carefully erased; and from the trampled appearance of the turf about it, she conjectured that the coffin also had been removed. It had. The rector had caused the grave to be opened in the presence of suitable witnesses at daybreak, and the

coffin was found to contain what Oliver Warleigh had stated, a mere log of wood swathed in flannel, the whole now crumbling down into decay. Certainly the conspirators had had great faith in that *somebody* who helped them when they trusted him so far as this, and showed so little fear of the curiosity of those who had loved the child, and who might have been tempted, notwithstanding the fever she was said to have died of, to seek a last glimpse of her darling face!

IV.

After Mrs. Lupton's return to London Dr. Frith had the audacity to write threatening letters to John Withers, to Lady Georgiana, and even to Sir Laurence Warleigh himself, declaring his resolve to publish the whole disgraceful story of Annis's abduction to the world unless he were duly bribed into silence. But no notice was taken of them, and he might make up his mind that he had received his last sixpence of wages for the share he had in that villainy. Before she made her exit from the Hurtlemere House, the worthy nurse plundered Lady Georgiana of all her jewelry, ready money, and other portable things of value; she even stripped her of clothing down to bare necessities, and with some articles her sisters-in-law had even been obliged to supply her.

Few who saw Lady Georgiana now could help pitying her. She had sunk into a state of apathetic despair; she said Frith might do his worst, for she had nothing left either to hope or to fear. Mortimer had not returned, neither had he written a single line to any one at the rectory since he went away. "He left us without a word, and it is borne in upon my mind that I shall never see him again," she said to Katherine one evening. "He will not hate me—Mortimer never vehemently loved or hated any thing, but he will forsake us. I do not expect ever to hear of him more."

He had been gone a fortnight now, and every one was anxious to hear some news of him—perhaps Sir Laurence the most anxious of any. He had not seen Oliver or Oliver's wife; he was not one to go out of his way to crush those who were crushed already; he never even mentioned their names, but of Mortimer he said he would take care; promising to fulfill the expectations in which he had been brought up to the utmost limits of his power. No one who knew Sir Laurence was surprised, but strangers and vindictive persons thought his generosity sheer quixotism. Oliver, since his residence at the rectory, had begun to rally, and Dr. Beane said there was no reason why he should not recover health and strength and outlive all his betters. He had taken to reading again, a custom for many years abandoned, and seemed even to enjoy his book. Miss Delia Ferrand could not be withheld from sending him a few specimens of her choice literature, which the Christian woman esteemed appropriate to his evil, sinful case, but it was not known that he gave them his attention—probably he did not; they were milk for babes.

A few evenings before the party at Prior's Bank broke up there was a large family gathering at dinner there; John Withers and Katherine, Arthur Hill and Grace, Dicky, merry

Andrew and Sacharissa Tulip came, the three last on the plea of making cousin Annis's acquaintance. The young people behaved with remarkable discretion, accepting her quite as a person of course, though they had been used to see her name on a gravestone for a dozen years; but no doubt there was a good deal of speculative discussion about her amongst themselves afterward. With her they kept to their own favorite topics of general interest; inquiring if she liked dogs and horses, if she could shoot or play cricket, and so forth, and finding they were of one mind on these great subjects, they pronounced her "very well for a girl," Sacharissa Tulip leading the eulogium. To hear that home-bred child of thirteen talk, strangers might have fancied she confused herself with her brothers, and impertinently believed herself their equal in point of sex! Her mamma quite openly deplored her hoydenishness, forgetting that she had been almost as wild at the same age. Rachel, who was her godmother, and therefore directly responsible for her morals and manners, was much less anxious; the child was generously disposed, very brave and truthful; not clever, and thus far not handsome, though she had been a lovely baby. Dicky called her "a good fellow," and so she was. A girl of her kind here and there makes a pleasing variety—Katherine admitted this in theory herself, but regretted that the practical specimen had fallen to her lot. Gipsy fraternized with her rough-girl cousin on the spot, and Sacharissa Tulip immediately fell in love with her, according to the enthusiastic manner of her time of life.

The guests were late in separating, for the hours were shortened by Sir Laurence's delighting the young folks' adventurous spirits with various anecdotes of his travels north, south, east, west—there seemed to be no known country in the world that he had not visited. Alice, who had contrived herself a seat close beside him, listened breathless as he told of journeyings through primeval forests, monotonous in a dead silence, unstirred by voice of beast or bird, where the long vistas of road stretched straight between the ranks of giant pines for miles without change, or break, journeyings that lasted for days. She asked if he had seen the Falls of Niagara.

"Yes," replied he, smiling at her ardent interest in every word that dropped from his lips. "Yes, I have seen the falls. My first sensation was almost one of disappointment, but they grow on the imagination until in their vast power and grandeur they overwhelm it with awe. There is a little vessel, the *Maid of the Mist*, in which if you be a man swathed in waterproof, and if you be a lady, shut up in a sort of glass case, you may go as near the boiling torrent as is pleasant—much nearer, in fact. It is a gallant little boat, and rides the waters like a sea-bird; I relish the sense of *some* dangers, but I was not sorry to be off that dancing foam-sprite, and safe on solid ground again. There were five persons that went under the fall that day besides myself, and the youngest of us, a tall lathy fellow as big as our friend Sinclair here, felt the strain on his nerves so terribly that he cried like a child when the feat was accomplished. I remained a week at Niagara, and each day

the scene was more and more terrifically grand. The morning I left a great raft of timber that had broken from its moorings high up the river went over the falls; it was composed of gigantic forest trees, but when it reappeared a mile or more below it was all broken up like a mere fagot of sticks."

The doctor wished to learn something of the traveling arrangements on the lakes, and Sir Laurence gave him a vivid sketch of a race when he was on board one of the contending steamboats. They were about ten miles out when the race began, and the excessive density of the smoke from the funnels first warned him of what was going forward. He spoke to the captain, asking if he felt himself justified in thus imperiling the lives of his passengers, but he acknowledged himself utterly powerless over his excited crew. They were all blacks, and on going down into the engine-room Sir Laurence saw them stripped to the skin, some smearing great junks of wood with lard and pitch, then thrusting them into the furnace holes to force the fires, while others played with water on the machinery to prevent it becoming red hot. They worked at their task like demons, heedless of danger. The vessel was a new one, very elegantly but slightly built, and walking on the deck Sir Laurence compared to walking with the undulating motion of a serpent under the feet.

"And what was the end of it?" asked Dicky, who had followed the story with increasing excitement at each novel incident.

"The end of it was that I went ashore at Buffalo," replied Sir Laurence, "and the race being continued next day the vessel I had left blew up; only fourteen persons being saved out of a crew and passengers numbering a hundred and eleven. They were thirty miles from land, and the survivors were picked up by the rival boat, which was astern."

Alice shuddered to think of her father's narrow escape, and Miss Flora addressing her nephew, said with great solemnity,

"Let me beg of you, dear Sinclair, when you go to America never on any account to sail in a racing-boat."

"He might be taken unawares as I was," remarked Sir Laurence. "But if he accepts my warning he will never engage his passage in any vessel but the mail-packets. They are timed at each station and restricted to a moderate speed; and it is at the captain's peril if he suffer the rules to be infringed."

Miss Delia in her spirit of universal philanthropy now wished to hear something of the slaves in the South from an eye-witness, but Sir Laurence had nothing very shocking to tell her—or would not tell it. He thought the system most costly, but had not witnessed any of the desperate cruelties he had read of in books of romance. Miss Delia then proclaimed herself an abolitionist pure and simple—all the slaves free to-morrow! to which Sir Laurence replied with a quotation that "suddenly to abandon the worst of vices was sometimes to entail the worst of consequences." If the three millions could be provided with free passes to the nearest fixed star, and there encouraged to found a sable republic, her prompt measures might be safe, otherwise he was of opinion that gradual ones would serve the purpose better. She shook her head—a

nation ought not to continue in sin a day after its sinfulness was acknowledged—do right and trust to Providence to bring His own good ends out of it. Sir Laurence dropped the argument, and no sooner had he done so than the discursive old lady was off to Central Africa, inquiring into the condition and prospects of her beloved heathen-tribes, and questioning the traveler straightly of his acquaintance among the dear missionaries. He went through his catechism with considerable spirit; and with interest to all his hearers; gave the missionaries high testimony for their courage and faithfulness, but did not express much tenderness for the object of their endeavors; appearing to feel that if all the savages were civilized off the face of the earth and numbered with extinct races it would be much more comfortable for the decent people left.

He had some hunting adventures to detail of this portion of his wanderings which held his listeners in thrall for ever so long; and Miss Delia remarked thereabout that Claymire would be proud if he would give them a lecture when he went down there, introducing these charming anecdotes into a general account of missionary labors in Western Africa. Poor Sir Laurence looked dismayed at this suggestion, and protested that he was nothing of a public speaker; but the enthusiastic old lady assured him his success would be conspicuous, and only relaxed in her efforts to extract a promise from him when she discovered that he entertained certain views far from orthodox and not at all suitable to be developed before a village audience.

For instance he did not wish to see caste abolished in India until there was something better to replace it, and thought moreover that caste prevailed amongst Christians as well as amongst Hindoos—did they not even go to the Lord's Table in castes? It appeared to him so. He had no great faith in the conversion of Jews; he thought it was 'once a Jew, always a Jew.' He believed that little progress would be made in Christianizing the heathen until native pastorates were rooted amongst them; and considered that as remnants of pagandom yet survived amongst nations enlightened a thousand and more years ago, so would they continue to survive wherever new religious systems were grafted in; and therefore teachers of the gospel must take wider views of social politics than they seemed commonly inclined to do. And finally he admired the spirit of the Roman Catholic missions as much as any; their priests being simple, devoted men, ready to brave poverty and labor of body in addition to all their other trials as he found few others were.

This silenced Miss Delia for good and all. "Sir Laurence is a brave and generous gentleman, but his views are unsound and unsettled," said she in confidence to her sister afterward. "He seems to think all faiths equally true and good if their holders be only sincere in their profession. I trust dear little Sunshine will remain firm to her principles. I would rather see the poor heathens left in their gross darkness than enlightened by the torch of Rome!" Miss Flora ventured to demur to this, but Miss Delia would not hear her. No good could come out of Rome—she had made up her mind to that long ago, and to suggest that any parts of its system might with advantage be restored to

Protestantism was as exciting and exasperating to her spirit as the fluttering of a red flag before the eyes of an infuriated bull. Her theories were of the narrowest, but her practical charity of the widest; to hear her harangue she might have been supposed a bigot and persecutor in grain; to see her life, none but must acknowledge her a kind, genuine, well-meaning Christian as ever lived.

Sir Laurence told his daughter he *loved* her; she was *thorough*; and *thorough* people were the only people to be trusted; and when he went to Brookfall, as he did about a fortnight after the aunts returned home, carrying Sunshine with him that they might have a last glimpse of her before she went abroad with him for the winter, he actually delivered that lecture in the school-room at Claymire; hurt nobody's feelings, and was himself complimented. From that evening Miss Delia excused his peculiar views, and was his friend for life; all the faster friend perhaps that she has not yet succeeded in getting him quite converted to her own.

CHAPTER THE FOURTH.

WEDDING BELLS.

THERE is a garden in her face,
Where roses and white lilies grow;
A heavenly paradise is that place,
Wherein all pleasant fruits do grow
There cherries grow that none may buy,
Till cherry-ripe themselves do cry.

RICHARD ALLISON.

I.

THE time of singing birds had come again, and with the singing birds came back its Sunshine to Brookfall. The aunts had had a very quiet cold-feeling winter at Claymire while she was abroad with her father. They arrived last from Penslaven, where Sinclair Ferrand had been staying with them since their return from Italy in March. Penslaven was to be the future home of Sinclair and Annis—Annis as we will now again call her since she has gotten back her kinsfolk and her rights. The lease on which it had been held had expired at Michaelmas, and Sir Laurence had determined to restore it, and fit it up anew for them. It was a pleasanter place than Whinstane Tower and in every way more desirable as a residence; the country round was richer and less wild, and there were more sociable neighbors near. Whinstane Tower was taken by the people who had hitherto had Penslaven; they were a large family, and wealthy and liberal, and it was thought better for the sake of the village that it should have a tenant than stand any longer empty. Katherine would fain have had Sir Laurence live there himself, but that he said he should never do; the Hurtlemere House would serve him as a retreat between his wanderings as heretofore, and when he was disposed for society the young folks would give him a corner by their hearth at Penslaven.

The destiny of pretty Prior's Bank was not settled yet. There had been a suggestion in the autumn that the Oliver Warleighs should take it and live there, but no conclusion was arrived at. They were still at the rectory, and every body began to think it time some change was made; for their permanent occupancy of so much of

the house prevented the rector and his wife from conveniently entertaining other guests. Of Mortimer there had been received as yet no tidings whatever; every possible effort had been made to trace him, but without success. Long since he must have been penniless, and he was not a young man ready enough either of wit or of hand to achieve sudden independence. On Lady Georgiana the suspense weighed more cruelly than could have done the saddest certainty; she seemed to be punished for her crime with a refinement of the very pains she had remorselessly inflicted.

One day soon after her return to Brookfall Annis fell to talking of Mortimer with Rachel Withers.

"I am sorry for Mortimer because the wrong was none of his doing," said she. "And papa too is greatly hurt that he should have shown so little trust in him after he had treated him in every respect like a son. He had not much courage or he would have staid by his father and mother. You fancied once, and so did aunt Delia, that I was in danger of loving him, but it was not really so. I never had any heart but for Sinclair. I was attracted to Mortimer because I felt at first sight that he was a link between me and the past, and any person or thing that promised to clear up the mystery of my childhood had a strong fascination for me. My conscience is clear with regard to him. I know by Sinclair's love for me that Mortimer never loved me—aunt Katherine doubts it, and I most earnestly wish, if he be living, that he would return or let us know where he is wandering. He does not remain away because of me, and I dislike the imputation that he should."

"I can not remember the time when I did not love Sinclair beyond all the world besides," she added by and by. "He was rest and refuge to me when I was unhappy, and when I was gay he was my merriest companion. He was never wearied or impatient with me, let me be as capricious as I would. From the night he carried me in his arms to Brookfall, and set me down by the dog in front of the kitchen fire, a little, hungered, beaten, miserable wretch, I have loved him and looked up to him as braver, better and kinder than any body save papa. So long ago as that, in his ways he reminded me of papa, and since I have seen them together, I think they are in disposition more alike than ever. He loves me faithfully, and I have grown to feel of late that apart from him I should only half live."

They were to be married in June, and the interval Annis was to spend with the aunts while preparations were being made. The good old ladies gave a solemn dinner-party to welcome Sir Laurence and his daughter, to which were invited all the old friends who had hitherto known Annis only as the bright and bonny Sunshine of Brookfall. She appeared in full-dress with pearls in her hair and on her satiny neck, and every body said she had bloomed into a more radiant loveliness than ever during her few months of absence. The little airs of dignity and responsibility she was acquiring suited her even more charmingly than her ancient caprices—not that *they* were to be considered as spirited away altogether, but simply that they had retired into the background, and were becoming less exacting.

Every body seemed to consider it right and delightful that Sunshine should be about to marry Sinclair, and merry little Miss Crispe who was amongst the guests said so expressly.

"It is so pretty of her—just like a fairy tale princess espousing her valiant deliverer from the fiery-eyed dragon," whispered she to Rachel Withers confidentially. "Since Claymire adopted her it is only just she should choose her prince there. I enjoy a true-love story as much by sympathy as if it were my own. I hope it won't come in at prayers to-night that this is a wicked, miserable world, for if it should I shall feel in duty bound to groan dissent. Look at those two—it does one's heart good to see them. Eden itself was not happier than this prettified little drawing-room with them in it."

Mr. More was invited to the feast but he declined it. He was courting again, and his present flame was Phoebe Wallis, who was seventeen last October; but even she turned up her little nose at him, though her probable alternative would be going out to teach. Mr. More looked too exclusively for youth and beauty, and youth and beauty do not like green spectacles and what Alice called "squeak-leather," in a lover's boots. But he had bought him a chestnut wig of the modern sort undistinguishable from natural hair, and had come out more brisk and gallant than ever since he went wooing to Knowle; and the gossips said that under maternal pressure there was every prospect of Phoebe giving way and becoming Mrs. More.

II.

Sir Laurence Warleigh went and came and did not remain permanently at Brookfall—the quiet discipline of the aunt's establishment being possibly too strict for his vagrant tastes and habits. On one occasion he set off with Sinclair for a few days' ramble along the coast, and in their double absence the time hung rather long on Sunshine's hands. Under these circumstances she bestowed some of her leisure on Rachel Withers as of old. One morning she came down to her sober friend's astonishment, in very clouded mood.

"How fast the time flies, how thickly events crowd one upon another," said she taking a seat by the open window and looking out at the spring flowers. "It is April again—last April I was without papa, I was not promised to Sinclair, poor cousin Mortimer was safe and well, and auntie Dee lectured me when I had my moods. It is a different world, this that I am living in now, Rachel; it is one full of happiness and contentment. If I were to set my heart to wish I do not know what more I could desire."

"Then you have but to learn to be thankful," responded Rachel. "A thankful spirit must be as acceptable to the Giver of good as one that has many needs and prays that they may be satisfied."

Annis paused thoughtfully on her words for a moment, and then went on.

"Is it wise to tell each other we must feel this and we ought to feel that? I was expressing my great happiness to auntie Dee this morning, hoping she would rejoice and sympathize with me, but I took her at a wrong moment; for she chilled it all by bidding me remember how

suddenly it might be blasted or taken utterly away from me. 'In the midst of life we are in death,' she said. It is the manner of her piety, for she is pious, Rachel; she is as genuinely true and good as any woman breathing. I did not need the familiar reminder, and it shocked and pained me inexpressibly. It is her way to dash every sweet cup with a drop of bitter—then I was vexed and sarcastic, and she was grieved and hurt. I am no better than I was for all I am so happy; and I have been haunted ever since with a dread lest papa or Sinclair should not come back to me—lest some accident should befall them. Things as strange and cruel have happened to other women."

"I would not imagine any event so improbable," returned Rachel, surprised but encouragingly. "I would have more trust were I you than to fear lest God should suffer my life to be destroyed just at its best and its brightest."

"But if I am not bearing my blessings as I ought?" she suggested further.

"If you are a faithless, fanciful little goose," was Rachel's irreverent answer; for she saw that tears would be the issue were no check administered to her whimsical disquietudes—disquietudes which she would never have felt had they not been put into her head.

About the middle of May Jane Grantham arrived at Brookfall to officiate as bridesmaid to Annis in conjunction with Rachel Withers's boyish madcap of a god-daughter. They would be a queer contrast those two. Sacharissa Tulip brought with her a new riding-suit; her first regular "all-of-cloth suit," as she appraised her godmamma, and she was ambitious of wearing it on the solemn occasion; being aware that she appeared to much better advantage in it than in any puffery of muslin or silk or lace. But Annis laughed at her and said, no, she would have none of the riding-habit on her wedding day; her maidens must look maidenly and keep her in countenance by being dressed alike all in white.

Jane Grantham showed like a sort of quakerish dove beside Rachel's hoyden niece. It was her fate to be a governess, but she had not yet had time to take the formal stamp of her order, and was fair, plump, cheerful and serene as if her monotonous working-life suited her to perfection. "I find her a most amiable young person and full of principle—we all like her," Miss Flora said to one of her friends; "but she is too retiring; she never speaks unless she be first spoken to, which is *proper* in her situation, I presume, but we could dispense with silence at holiday time; it makes her look shy and dull, and she has plenty both of sense and conversation when she is alone with us."

Rachel Withers walked up to Brookfall by invitation to inspect the bridal splendors when they came from town, and there she found the three young ones with the aunts and Miss Crispe enjoying the sober pleasures of contemplation each in her own way. Annis stood the center of an admiring group, submitting herself to the manipulations of the skillful waiting-woman who had been her maid "all to herself" since her change of fortune, while the wedding-dress of richest silk and costliest lace was being fitted on. The aunts were seated in silent dignity of watchfulness, and Jane Grantham leaned against

the window-sill holding the Brussels vail and crown of myrtle and orange blossoms; Miss Crispe flitted round and round, active and helpful, settling here a plait and there a fold, while Sacharissa Tulip who never could sit down in private like any other young Christian gentlewoman, was perched on the top of a chest of drawers, arrayed in full equestrian costume, her plumed hat in one hand, and her whip in the other, impatient to be off for a promised gallop on the downs with her uncle Laurence, and pretending that the whole ceremony of "trying on" was unnecessary and a bore. Nobody believed her, of course; for to women worth a chip such ceremonies are perfect enjoyment.

"It will be your turn some day, missikin, and then you will talk quite differently," said Miss Crispe, wagging her head at the scornful chit.

"No, it will never be my turn, for I propose to lead a single life," retorted she. I shall keep two horses, a big dog, a man and a maid, and be like that celebrated lady called 'Boy in Blue,' who was extant in Moor Murray's time, and the most famous toast in the dales."

"You are forming yourself on a distinguished model then, are you, my dear? We fancied you were perfectly original," said Miss Delia, dryly. Sacharissa Tulip was not very quick, but she detected the slight flavor of sarcasm in the old lady's speech; for she rapped her lips with the gold foxhead of her riding-whip, and made no reply.

"The wonder and admiration of the men is your ambition after all," added Miss Flora, who as strongly as her mildness permitted made a point of discouraging mannish girls. "It is only that you take a longer way round to win them than most women think it worth while to do. And the 'Boy in Blue' was married finally, you know, and had children three or four. I have heard that she was a very peaceable sort of old woman and took snuff copiously in the later years of her life. You must ask the doctor—he can tell you all about her; for he knew her when he was a boy and we lived in the north."

Sacharissa Tulip evidently felt this turn of the conversation distasteful; she did not like the degradation of her ideal into a snuffy old grandame; she would have preferred to hear that she died in harness over a hurdle at a steeplechase, perhaps; at any rate she forsook the feminine society and went off whistling to cover her defeat. Annis was by this time invested in as much of her bridal raiment as she would allow to be put on, and the result having been pronounced from every point of view perfect, the retrograde process commenced and all tongues were set free.

"It is a pity and a shame, yes, I declare it is, that every girl has not your chance of looking beautiful once in her life, Sunshine!" cried Miss Crispe with great energy. "I should like to see you married too, my dear," addressing Jane; "and perhaps we shall. There is no telling what may happen one of these fine days."

"There won't happen a chance for me," responded Jane, airily. "I have quite made up my mind that it is my vocation to be a good teacher and nothing else or better. I have had a lucky beginning, and as there is a baby only a year old where I am, I may perhaps have the enviable luck to stay until she is seventeen—and that will make me seven and thirty myself."

"Stuff and nonsense!" ejaculated Miss Crispe. "I won't listen to you; nice, soft, fair thing that you are, how dare you talk in that way; I call it perfectly wicked, setting nature at defiance! You will be some good man's delight yet, I know."

Jane smiled unmoved, but Miss Flora presently whispered something about Mr. Wilson's having cast sheep's eyes on her. "He dined here yesterday and I shall ask him again. It would be the very thing for them both—pity she has no money; I am not sure he could afford to marry without, but we shall see."

Miss Wilson had married in February, and since she left him her brother had looked rather forlorn, as if his buttons were not seen after with the domestic punctuality essential to the well-being of a man and a curate. The elderly housekeeper she had provided for him was too old to undertake the responsibility of buttons, and in the end, if he valued his comfort he would have to provide her with a younger substitute—he would have to go far to find a better than Jane Grantham. He was thirty-four, diligent in the parish work, pleasant-looking, pleasant-mannered and with a fund of quiet good sense. Jane was one-and-twenty and something more than pretty; she had a bright, kind face, a lovely figure, and a capital temper, and was altogether very nice and womanly. They were just the sort of people who thrown together under favorable auspices would take to each other with a beautiful spontaneity. Miss Flora was no advocate for marriages of convenience with trust in Providence for the love coming after, but she believed this would be a very desirable match, and for the first time in her life she turned maneuverer in endeavoring to bring it about.

III.

About a fortnight before the wedding, Rachel Withers one morning received a letter from her friend Carrie Martin, who had just gone down for a month to a favorite retreat of hers on the Scotch coast. Carrie believed she had come upon traces of Mortimer Warleigh, but if so, they ended in a *grave*—in an unmarked grave in the stranger's nook of a little low-land coast churchyard. When Carrie went down to Frasersburn she lodged in a cottage detached from the village inn, but belonging to the landlady and under her management. She was friends with the fishermen, with their wives and bairns every one; and here she rusticated cheaply and happily, rubbing off the dust of work, and living almost wholly on the sea and rocks. She had known the place a dozen years, and had visited it almost every summer with one companion as well able to enjoy roughing it as herself; growing at each return more attached to the picturesque beauty of the place, and the kindly simplicity of the people. It was from the landlady at the inn in the course of one of those incident gossips of which Carrie was so fond that she learned the circumstances that she now wrote in full detail to Rachel.

One Saturday night in the early autumn, when the days first began to draw in, there had come to the inn a young, south-country traveler; the landlady did not like the look of him, and shut the door against him, suspecting that he belonged to a set of tramps who had haunted

about the place all summer, committing depredations on hen-roosts and the like; but as she went about the house getting supper ready for her family, her mind troubled her that he looked ill, and *might* be a traveler as he professed, and that if he *were* there was no other inn within three miles or more. So she opened the door to see if he remained still within hail, and found to her grief and surprise that he had lain down in an open cartshed by the collie-dog, too weary, worn, and dejected to seek any other shelter; the beast though savage enough to most wayfarers had not molested him—a dereliction from his duty which appeared forcibly to have struck her. She exalted her voice and bade the stranger come in, but he did not stir, and being alarmed she called to her son to bring a light, when they found that he was in the death agony. He was carried into the house, and laid gently on a heap of sacking within the glow of the fire; then one lad went for the doctor and another for the minister, and the mother and the lass did their best to stay the fluttering spark of existence with such restoratives as they possessed; but all would not do—"his life's days were sped." He passed away about an hour after, never reawaking to consciousness, with a quiet sigh as of one sinking to welcome rest. On the body there was found nothing by which to identify him. His clothing was coarse and ragged, but his hands were soft and white, and had never done a day's work since he was born. The personal description given of him tallied in most respects with Mortimer; the only discrepancy was in the color of their hair; Mortimer's was glossy light brown, thick and waved, the wanderer's was said to have been quite dark.

Rachel Withers mentioned nothing of what she had heard to any one at Brookfall, but sent the letter straight to her brother John, who went to Frasersburn accompanied by Lady Georgiana immediately; but after the amplest investigations they returned to the rectory, having come to the conclusion that the hapless stranger was *not* Mortimer. The same dreary uncertainty as before therefore still continued to hang over his fate. It was a desperate ordeal for his mother to go through.

"If it was not my boy it might have been," she said to Katherine. "If he be not at rest, somewhere in the world my boy may be suffering what that poor soul suffered. It is God's judgment upon me—God's judgment upon me!"

It was strange—no, it was *not* strange—it was simply in harmony with the original warp of his character, but it seems to excuse a thing of which humanity might be ashamed when we say it is *strange* or out of nature; but Oliver Warleigh seemed to feel his position scarcely at all. Of Mortimer he never spoke either tenderly or regretfully. He was safe—he had no new penalty to pay; he had escaped from a long direful captivity to false pretenses. The worst was over and he was unharmed; his dreaded tyrant was gone and he was free. The hideous dishonor did not gall him; he was sensible only of the relief from a haunting terror such as the sins and iniquities of but very few it is to be hoped create for them. He had not seen his injured brother nor expressed a wish to see

him; neither had he said a word tending to prove a wholesome sense of his guilt. Perhaps active repentance was not to be expected from a soul dulled by long continuance in its sin. His health was gradually becoming reestablished; and as pity for his once obtrusive wretchedness grew out of place, his stolid, selfish ease and apathy were sickening to contemplate.

Lady Georgiana's journey to Frasersburn spurred her up to plan a removal from Hurdledale; she soon after announced a design of going to settle permanently abroad where Roderick would enter some foreign service. Neither John nor Katherine sought to gainsay her resolve—the rectory began to feel that it had borne their burden long enough; and even under the protection of that roof the guilty pair were not safe from the persecution of their former accomplices. Mrs. Lupton and Dr. Frith would be thorns in their flesh as long as they lived, and not thorns only, but greedy leeches to keep them perpetually poor in purse. Lady Georgiana had twice satisfied their rapacity since Christmas, and their claim on her thus reacknowledged was never again likely to be withdrawn. Sir Laurence, though he in a manner subsidized these wretches by every guinea he allowed his brother, told Mr. Bond he had no new orders to give respecting the sum that had been paid to Oliver on Mortimer's account, and it was therefore continued. He was in no humor for paltry revenges; he took his daughter and was thankful; saying that if his brother did not repent of the great wrong he had done him as it was, he would not repent when suffering under a mean punishment. Time and age had mellowed this man who was vindictive as a pagan in his younger days, and he showed it in letting his forgiveness take the most practical and unusual form.

IV.

Wedding-bells are not always joy-bells, but on the day when Sinclair and Sunshine were married every body allowed there was not the faintest echo of minor in their melody. It was a fine morning—resplendent—and the Brookfall garden with the glow on its crimson, pink and white showers of roses looked in full bridal summer array.

Leaving John and Katherine, Arthur Hill and Grace to follow an hour later, Rachel Withers and her promising god-daughter went up to the cottage betimes; Sacharissa Tulip, in spite of herself, quite gay and girlish in raiment of snow, while the beloved riding-habit was left reposing it dark, heavy folds in the wardrobe.

"I know I look like a 'silly goose,'" said she, as much ashamed and as little at ease in her unaccustomed finery as if she had been Dicky or merry Andrew himself. "My bonnet won't stick on!" And here she gave it a vicious pull which threatened to sever the union between brim and crown at once.

Rachel was truly thankful to get her safely landed in the Brookfall drawing-room; for she was understood to be responsible for her appearance when her mamma arrived; they two with aunt Grace's help having dressed her under a flow of lingual derision positively marvelous at her years. She declined doing her duty of assistance at the bride's toilet, so Rachel left

her down-stairs, defending herself in a spirited way under the sarcasm of her uncle Laurence, who professed to sympathize in her abhorrence of smart clothes; but having got rid of her god-mamma, she employed the interval before the arrival of the guests in visiting a paddock adjoining the garden, where was a nice little colt with its mother. Sir Laurence aided, abetted and accompanied her, and the consequence was that when Katherine next saw her hopeful daughter, she had good reason for saying to Rachel in accents of deep reproach: "Look at that child's bonnet, Rachel; and where *has* she been with the hem of her dress? You promised me to keep an eye upon her!" Whatever Rachel had promised beforehand, she was glad to shut both her eyes to her for the remainder of the day!

Annis was nearly ready when Rachel went up to her room, and though not conversationally disposed she was nevertheless as blithe and as smiling as a bride should be on the crowning day of her life. The aunts looked a good deal excited as was only natural.

"You are come then, dear Rachel?" cried Miss Delia, greeting her with a gush of feeling. "The day is here at last that takes our Sunshine from us, and we are all wishing it well over."

"Don't say that, sister, when it is our own Sinclair who wins her. Young folks should marry, and we have every thing to be thankful for—and we *are* thankful," said Miss Flora, taking her invariable line of thought.

"I shall be very happy, auntie Dee, and we shall soon see you again," murmured Annis, caressing her benefactress.

"I am not so sure of that when once you take wing," was the old lady's pathetic rejoinder. "I would not undertake to predict your return under three or four years at the shortest. These children are going into Switzerland first, Rachel; then into Italy, and they talk about the Isles of Greece, and Egypt, and Syria, and if they wander off there it will have to be a long whistle indeed, my dear, that will bring them back. *Happy*, of course, you will be happy with Sinclair and your father; who doubts it? And with pyramids to climb, and risks to run, and a general picnic sort of life on camels and asses as they travel in those countries, you will be in what you used to call 'a state of beatitude,' but it will be very dull often at Brookfall—it will be like November all the year round."

"No, no, Delia dear, there will be frequent letters," interrupted Miss Flora with gentle remonstrance.

"And mind you write long ones, and full of details—don't think any incident too trifling to amuse us!" added Miss Delia.

"I will write just as I should talk if I were with you—half a volume a day," replied Annis gayly.

While they were thus exchanging last words as it were, Hawkins was packing into a small traveling trunk some of the bride's most needful belongings, and she was superintending the process between whiles and giving directions.

"It is my fear, auntie Dee, that Sinclair intends to lose our large luggage at the first opportunity, and I know when papa joins us he will never let us carry about those great im-

perials that are standing in the hall," said she, exciting a spur of alarm in the old lady's temper with a view of suppressing more sentimental emotions; but Mrs. Crofts, her own maid, interposed with a solemn assurance that *she* understood traveling, and that she would take good care that nothing went astray that was under *her* charge, which assurance mitigated Miss Delia's anxiety.

"Lose your luggage, Sunshine, you had not need lose your luggage!" cried the old lady. "Consider all those elegant dresses, and your lovely pearls, and emeralds, and diamonds! Not but that a simple flower in your hair is quite as pretty, but jewels *are* jewels! Lose them, indeed! But I can trust Mrs. Crofts—she is a responsible person and will look after you."

This setting off into the world of "the children" seemed as critical an event to Miss Delia as her baby's first step alone is to a mother. She had a thousand doubts of how her protégée would get on without her watchful eye.

Annis was standing fully attired, a vision of beauty and delight, when there came a knock at the door, and Grace and Katherine entered; then there was a little fuss in the old nursery adjoining, and that was Sir Laurence and Sinclair, who, Miss Delia said, according to etiquette, had no right to be there; but as he *was* there, he might have just one glimpse of his Sunshine. Sinclair, in his way, looked as well as she did, his aunts thought.

After the ordinary amount of bustle the party started to church. All the village had turned out to see. The school-girls, according to immemorial custom, scattered flowers in the bride's path, and the boys took up posts of vantage ready to cheer the "weddiners" when they issued forth again. The doctor was to marry the young couple, not assisted by any body, and when they entered the church, he was in his place, robed and ready. The sun was pouring through the chancel window like a glory, and as it fell on the two heads bowed reverently before the altar, the witnesses accepted it, one and all, for an omen of good, and a token of blessing.

It was soon over, and every body on the way back to Brookfall again. Sacharissa Tulip's free and easy comments on the chief actors in the ceremony made on the homeward drive, were eminently characteristic. "Sinclair Ferrand behaved *well*, I will say that for him," she began. "It is so silly of a man to be nervous when he is getting married—that is the bride's prerogative; but he looked as cool, determined and self-possessed as if he were going to take a *rasper* out hunting. When Mr. Simmonds was married to Blanche Fielding, he stood all the while on one leg like a meditative fowl—so absurd! and as every body *said* it was too late to be meditating *then*. Cousin Annis was very nice too, but I did not expect to see tears in her eyes,—but they looked pretty for her, so therefore it did not matter. As they are so desperately fond, I suppose they liked to get married, but for the other people it is not half such good fun as a picnic or a riding party!"

No—the day altogether disappointed the young Amazon. There was the solemnity of the breakfast during which, not being hungry, she had nothing to do but to keep critical watch over Sinclair, who was not betrayed into any

awkwardness, and did not even trip or stumble in his little speech of thanks for congratulation. It was all monotonously easy. But there was the setting off, and the showers of old satin shoes to throw after the departing pair for luck; this was her little opportunity; one of them sent the postillion's hat flying; she clapped her hands at her successful aim, and that was her solitary triumph—the one bright spot in her day—knocking off the postillion's hat.

The dinner in the evening was a very quiet celebration, all the wedding guests having left

after the breakfast except the members of the two families and Mr. Wilson, who staid for his own and Jane Grantham's sake. The dear old aunts went through the excitement splendidly, and when the friends who had remained were finally wishing them good-night and good comfort, and committing them to the care of Sir Laurence, Miss Delia said with profound fervor and simple truth—"It has been the happiest day of my life, my dears!" and Miss Flora for once entirely agreed with her. It was a day marked with chalk to all concerned.

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